Go with hope to the fight
against the enemies of God. . . .
The Lord beseech you to destroy
that vile race from the lands. . . .
What a disgrace if such a despised
and base race should conquer a people
which has the faith of omnipotent God.

—Pope Urban II, on the eve of the first Christian Crusade, 27 November 1095
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Editor: Hendrik R. Pieters
Email: hpieters@gbhem.org
Website: http://www.quarterlyreview.org
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Rethinking War and Peace

HENDRIK R. PIETERSE

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27). Thus spoke Jesus of Nazareth, hailed by Christians as the Prince of Peace. This promise of peace notwithstanding, the path of Christianity has been intertwined with violence and terror—even war—from its inception. Indeed, the very event that constitutes the faith’s redemptive core is born of suffering and bloodshed. Ever since, violence has marked the history of the Christian movement—to this day. Perhaps, as Tertullian famously claimed in his Apologeticus, the blood of Christians spilled at the hands of their enemies is the seed from which the church grows.

And yet, as its checkered history makes clear, too often the church has been the perpetrator rather than the victim of violence. Betraying the peace bequeathed to her, the church too frequently has instigated bloodshed rather than suffered it. To be sure, for most Christians inhabiting the prosperous North Atlantic states, perpetrating violence in the name of their faith, and, until recently, suffering religiously inspired violence is little more than historical memory. But as Sandra Olewine’s moving essay demonstrates, for vast numbers of the world’s population, religiously inspired conflict and bloodletting are the stuff of everyday life. For these persons, the question is not whether violence will happen but how the resources of faith might be engaged to live redemptively in the midst of bloodshed and fear. Drawing on her own experience as United Methodist liaison in Jerusalem for the General Board of Global Ministries, Olewine argues that Jesus summons Christians to move beyond an understanding of forgiveness as discrete acts to forgiveness as a state, a way of being.

For Americans, the events of September 11, 2001, made religiously provoked violence and living with its constant possibility terrifying realities. For persons of faith, suddenly the questions of “just war,” pacifism, the
Christian's relationship to military service and to the state, peacemaking, and more—previously the province of academicians and church bureaucrats—now took on concrete pertinence and existential urgency. The essays in this issue seek to contribute to this vital conversation among United Methodists.

In the opening essay, Tyron Inbody provocatively argues that the invocation of religious rhetoric in President Bush's prosecution of the "war on terror" amounts to nothing less than a "holy war, motivated, interpreted, and justified by the use of religious language." Inbody then draws on Scripture and theology to offer his own alternative to the language of holy war.

Ellen Marshall's essay mines the United Methodist Social Principles, resolutions, bishops' statements, and Wesleyan theology as resources for recovering disciplined moral reflection on the means of war. While United Methodists do not have a dogmatic position on the question of war, Marshall says, our social teachings do yield "a certain shape to our witness." She concludes with five characteristics of United Methodist witness in times of war inherent in our social tradition that remind United Methodists of "who we are and what we can offer to a society swept up in war."

Robert Phillips, the senior United Methodist chaplain in the United States Navy, offers a rare glimpse into the demanding ministry of United Methodist chaplains in the United States military in the context of combat and the war on terrorism. With the expertise of a seasoned veteran, Phillips deftly constructs an understanding of the demands and dilemmas, the hopes and the struggles of the military chaplain in the throes of combat. Readers come away with a profound sense of the expectations placed on clergy who serve as military chaplains, both by the military and by The United Methodist Church, in combat and crisis situations; how the church and the military prepare clergy to meet those expectations; and the issues of theology and pastoral care that emerge in the midst of ministry in combat.

For Clarke Chapman, both religious terrorism and the "shock of vulnerability" experienced on September 11 have their origin in a sense of existential anxiety. Healing "the nerve center that cries out with a sense of loss," he claims, requires nothing less than a new pastoral theology rooted in the resources of depth psychology and of theology—specifically, the prophetic witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Hendrik R. Pieterse is the editor of Quarterly Review.
The War on Terror and the "Wrongful Use of the Name of the Lord Your God"

TYRON INBODY

The Use of Religious Language in the War on Terror

In the past month, America has been looking through a rare window of moral clarity to witness a classic showdown of good and evil. And our religious leaders took a personal day. . . . Maybe some of America’s religious leaders should dial up the Big Boss and ask for a little more faith in their own country.

September 11 is both a chronological and a mythological day that radically altered our consciousness as a nation. Our instinctive response to the cruelty of the terrorists’ attack was to declare our rage, regain our balance, honor the heroism of the rescuers, and retaliate, thereby defying the hatred of the United States that motivated the carnage. President Bush immediately called us to arms in a “war on terror.” However, his war on terror is not simply a conventional war of armed political conflict. It is a holy war, motivated, interpreted, and justified by the use of explicitly religious language.

I must be honest. The world is better off without the Taliban and the Baathist regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq. Saddam Hussein is a murderous tyrant. The cruelty of his regime needed to be halted and reversed. Furthermore, many people throughout the world would be better off without any number of murderous dictators. The moral dilemma for many of us is whether the fact that some countries are drenched in blood justifies our military intervention. There are other countries that practice human rights violations and genocide, but we have done next to nothing about them.
Therefore, the debate is not whether but how to accomplish our goal of freedom and justice. Furthermore, does some perceived threat to the United States justify our prosecution of a preventive or a preemptive war, or even a crusade? Will we use our incomparable power for good, for the liberation of tyrannized people and the spread of justice; or will we use our power for bad, for a new imperialism? What is equally disconcerting is the possibility that the former is but a version of the latter.

It has been clear from the beginning that the Bush Administration is intent on remaking the Middle East in our image as a modern, Western-style liberal democracy. What I want to note is the extent to which the President has used explicitly religious language as a way to motivate, interpret, and justify two (realtoritary and preemptive) wars in two years, in Afghanistan and in Iraq. The fact that each side of the debate appeals to religious language in supporting or criticizing the war on terror, of course, is neither exceptional nor inappropriate. But many Christians in the United States have concluded that their Christian faith entails the belief that this nation was assigned by God to spread freedom, liberal democracy, and capitalism around the globe. I claim that such a belief entails the "wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God" (Exod. 20:7). One of the distinctive things about the "war on terror" is that the leader of our government has used explicitly religious language to motivate and justify a preemptive war. Of course, all presidents have used religious language for civic purposes; here, President Bush simply follows suit. However, in addition to using the religious language of our civil religion, President Bush is a person of distinctively Christian faith. Indeed, he is one of the more resolutely faith-based presidents of the recent past. His conversion is evidence of the power of faith to save a life and a family. The President prays regularly and reads the Bible and other devotional literature. He is committed to "people serving something greater than themselves in life." Behind all of this is his controlling sense of providence. All events are driven by the divine will and force: "Behind all life and all history there is a dedication and purpose, set by the hand of a just and faithful God." The United States is chosen by God to lead the world. This entails a higher calling on his life to bring God's gift of freedom to "every human being in the world." God has called him to lead the nation in this time of terror. He will be judged by history and by God by his ability to prevent another attack on the United States.
Christians of all stripes can appreciate, honor, and give thanks to God for President Bush's devotion to his faith and for his sense of vocation. But he has gone beyond the use of God's name in ceremonial piety and his sense of God's providence and his vocation to speak as though he were anointed by God to take the nation into a war of his own choosing. He uses the religious language of a "holy war," not the moral language of a "just war," to defend his administration's decision to remake the map of the Middle East in our image. Immediately following the 9/11 attacks, he called for a "crusade" against terrorism. Although he quickly dropped the word, he has never defended his war as a just war, based on the just cause to protect civilization. Rather, he speaks of a war on "evildoers." His is a preventive war, based not on an immanent or actual threat to the nation but on a possible threat. It is a preemptive war, a proactive war for the purpose of "regime change." Claims the President, "Our nation is chosen by God and commissioned by history to be a model to the world of justice." Since 9/11, his public speeches and official statements about the war on terror (such as his State of the Union speech and his remarks following the Columbia space shuttle disaster, at the National Prayer Breakfast, and at the National Religious Broadcasters convention) have employed the language of religion to motivate and justify his actions in the name of God's purposes, election, and providence.

In addition to the language of providence, President Bush's religious basis for prosecuting his war on terror includes an apocalyptic, even Manichean, view of the world. He speaks often about good versus evil and the righteous versus the evildoers. He has an unambiguous sense of what and who is good and evil. In this view of the world, the enemy is demonized. "We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name." There is an "axis of evil" in the world, and the evildoers (Bin Laden and Hussein) have no moral character, no humanity, no rights, and no just cause on their side. There is no legitimacy in anything "the terrorists" desire, say, or do. They are all wrong; we are all right. Bush's faith does not tolerate or even recognize any sense of the complexity and ambiguity of the political and economic structures of history and of the nations involved in this conflict. This prevents him from deciding whether war against Afghanistan and Iraq is just, according to the classical theory of the just war. He simply decided Saddam was an evildoer and everything followed uncritically and unrestrainedly from this decision.
For you don’t count the dead when God’s on your side.5

For Christians, the question is not the use of religious language in evaluating the war on terror but rather the use of religious language that is appropriate to Scripture and the gospel. Admittedly, using Scripture as a resource is a mixed bag. The “warrior God” is foundational to Jewish and Christian Scriptures, and God’s violence is a key story line in the Bible (Num. 31:3, 7, 9-11, 14-15, 17-18; Deut. 7:1-2, 5-6; 13:6-11; Josh. 11:20; Judg. 11:23-24; Isa. 13:9, 15-17a, 25-9-10, 60:11-12; Jer. 21:3-6; Ps. 18:45-48; Matt. 13:40-42; Rev. 11:17-18). Furthermore, the zealous nationalism of Ezra and Nehemiah, and especially of Obadiah and Nahum, portrays God on the side of one particular nation, whose destruction of the enemy is justified. The “other” is an outsider, a heretic, an infidel, an evildoer to be fought and eliminated. This view is still potent in the fundamentalisms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and in modern Western liberalism, with its wars against those who oppose a secular state, which promote individual and political freedom, democracy, capitalism, and the Western way of life.*

Religiously motivated and justified violence is not simply a problem of the misinterpretation of the Bible—it is taught in the Bible.7 “The Bible is full of wars. Not only wars—but slaughters, genocides—in which entire nations, entire peoples, are wiped from the face of the earth.”8 Violence lies at the heart of the sacred texts of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, who are taught to follow the commands of God to become the image of God. Their texts allow, support—even command—believers to wage war for and like God. God commands to fight and kill over thirty-five times in the Old Testament.

The problem may be religion itself, with its absolute truth claims, its unquestioned obedience to commands and teachings, and its dream of establishing an ideal time of perfection.9 Although no religion is free from violence, there may be a particular impulse in the monotheistic faiths toward violence because of the totalizing impulse of monotheism, which abhors, reviles, and rejects whatever it defines as outside its compass. Holy wars know no limits and admit no moral quandaries. Whether monotheism leads to crusades because of its absolutism, which excludes and demonizes the outsider;10 or whether it is the only principle that relativizes all finite realities and loyalties under the one transcendent and absolute reality (God)11 not only is an academic debate among scholars and theologians today but is at
the center of the debate about holy wars, just wars, and pacifism.

Ironically, bin Laden's and Bush's rhetoric sounds eerily similar: "jihad" and "Operation Infinite Justice." There is not much difference between a "holy war" and a "war on terror." Both are crusades based on a grievance, followed by a violent response justified by faith in an absolute God and his will to punish the evildoer. The problem with the war on terror is not Bush's Christian faith and his sincerity but his unambiguous and unnuanced conviction that he is doing his biblical God's will. In making his decisions to pursue his war, he has crossed the line by misunderstanding the God of his Scripture and tradition and the Jesus who is the object of his faith. The fact that presidents, politicians, laypersons, pastors, and theologians use biblical language does not necessarily condone a war on terror as a holy war.

**Religious Resources for Rejecting a Holy War on Terror**

Religion of every kind involves the promise that the misery and futility of existence can be overcome or even transfigured. One might suppose that the possession of such a magnificent formula, combined with the tremendous assurance of a benevolent God, would make a person happy. But such appears not to be the case: unease and insecurity and rage seem to keep up with blissful certainty, and even to outpace it.

Scripture, however, is a multivalent book. It is a mistake to present the Bible as a document promoting holy wars. Christian Scripture and tradition are rich in other resources for moral guidance in a time of war. Other fundamental themes mute, undercut, even repudiate the violence of crusades. War is criticized in both the Old and New Testaments. More significantly, in both Testaments the "suffering servant" exists and lives in the world as a radical alternative to redemptive violence. Deep in Scripture is the eschatological promise that God's peace (shalom) will come and that the beginning of this era of peace will arrive (Old Testament) or has arrived (New Testament) with God's messiah. Both Jews and Christians live under God's messianic promise and rule. These alternative themes to the holy war mentality, coupled with the biblical awareness that we exist in a fallen world where no one is wholly righteous, have led many Christians to develop a theory of the just war. This theory is a significant alternative to the holy war or crusade and to political wars waged solely on the basis of national interests or plunder. To be sure, there is nothing in the just war tradition that is directly biblical. The just war theory, which emerged
between the fourth and seventeenth centuries, was rooted in Greek philosophy and Roman law. Nevertheless, it is a rigorous theory of strict guidelines and is a Christian alternative to the holy war.

The United Methodist Church implicitly acknowledges the just war doctrine in its prayer "For Those in Military Service" in the *Book of Worship*: "Guard brave men and women in military service... Though for a season they must be people of war..."14 The problem with the just war theory is not the theory itself but the fact that it is always applied after a war is fought on some other grounds.

No authoritative Christian body has ever, prior to the commencement of fighting, decreed that one side or the other is justified in warfare on the basis of just war criteria. Instead, the sorry record reveals that Christian churches have usually simply endorsed the side on which they happen to find themselves. ... I know of no national church body (and very few significant Christian leaders) that, at the inception of hostilities, has ever denounced a war of national interest fought by its own nation.15

Even though just war theory takes seriously both the realities of a broken world and the importance of moral judgments, it does not appeal to the heart of the gospel as God's promise of peace in a broken world. The core of Christian teaching about war is not the holy war, or even the just war, but the peace of God embedded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is overwhelming evidence that Jesus was a pacifist and that his followers, for the first three centuries, were pacifists.16 This fact was suppressed or ignored in the church's traditional teaching about war following the Constantinian establishment of the church, as Augustine was developing the just war theory. Throughout the history of the church, pacifism was retained primarily among the Franciscans, the Waldensians, the Hutterites, Wycliff's followers, the Anabaptists, the Brethren, and the Quakers. As a holiness sect striving for perfection by means of a common discipline, The United Methodist Church, somewhat in tension with its acceptance of the just war doctrine, teaches that "war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ" and that "war and bloodshed are contrary to the gospel and the spirit of Christ."17 We teach this not because it is a nice idea or because it will make war less likely but because Jesus commands his disciples to love their neighbors and enemies, forbids them killing their enemies, and teaches them to
pray and to do good to them (Matt. 5:44, 22:39, 26:52; John 18:36). It is impossible for Christians to promote a "war on terror" on the basis of what Jesus said and did. The only theological grounds for a Christian to support such a war is to adopt the holy war tradition of the Old Testament and of apocalyptic destruction of evil in the New Testament as the (or a) Christian view of war. But Jesus commanded us to overcome evil with good, not with a religious war on terror. Even in Revelation, the most violent book of the Bible, God's warrior is the Lamb, whose cross is salvation. The nature of God's kingdom and of Jesus' messiahship is peace. This is the "canon within the canon," the biblical standard for evaluating any holy war or just war.

Although I have great sympathy for the pacifist position, I cannot adopt a strictly pacifist position. First, I am too much influenced by the mainstream tradition of the church, which grows out of Christian teachings about the Fall and the consequences of sin in individuals and society. There are perilous times that may warrant the use of force or military action to counter the depth of human violence, injustice, repression, and genocide. There is little doubt in my mind that the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the prospect of additional mass murder through terrorist means required swift and decisive action. The depth of repression and killing during the Hussein regime is clear; it needed to be halted. But the Christian cannot justify a preemptive or preventive war on terror on the basis of the religious language of Scripture.

In evaluating the use of religious language to make the case for a "holy war on terror," the Christian who stands on the border between pacifism and just war theory must consider three things. First, although just war theory conceives that a perilous situation may warrant a decisive use of force or military action, such action cannot be cloaked in explicitly religious language or justified as a religious war. The just war tradition insists that military action is the last resort and follows the failure of alternative ways to restrain injustice. At least two facts suggest that Bush's war on terror is more a strategy of United States foreign policy than the pursuit of a just war: the speed with which the war was carried forward, without evidence of an imminent threat to our nation; the selection of the (oil-rich) Middle East as the place to carry on a war on terror in the face of many other places of violence, repression, and genocide around the globe. A war on terror is not the only primary, or best way to respond to such violence. The response to the threat of militant fundamentalists does not require a preventive or preemptive or aggressive war to meet the challenge. Use of military force for
anything other than defensive purposes in response to a real and immanent attack on the United States is a violation of just war principles, as articulated in much of the Christian tradition and widely accepted in international law. War cannot be an instrument of foreign policy, including the policy of “remaking” the Middle East into a modern liberal democracy.

Second, even if Christians decide to support the Bush Administration's decisions and actions to engage in a war on terrorism in the form Bush has chosen, our reasons must not be cloaked in the explicitly religious language of good versus evil, righteous versus unrighteous, elect versus damned, or insider versus outsider. In a fallen world, in which all of us are sinners and prone to violence, both “we” and “they” are implicated in the injustices, inequalities, and violence that spark terrorism. As a citizen, the Christian cannot support a war on terror that is justified as a holy war. In the light of Jesus' teachings, especially the Sermon on the Mount, and of his life, especially his cross as redemptive suffering, the Christian cannot justify redemptive violence as the means to peace and justice. Christian faith is rooted in, motivated by, and aims for peace, both the inner peace of forgiveness of sins and peace among the peoples of the earth and the whole creation.

My point is not that Christians can never be involved in military action or that terrorism (on all sides) does not need to be stopped, perhaps by force of some kind or degree (economic sanctions, international peacekeeping troops, legal prosecutions and imprisonment, or any number of other possibilities). Rather, my point is that Christians cannot use their language about God, God's providence, divine election, vocation, righteousness, and hope to motivate and justify a crusade against terrorists. Christians are limited to a debate between pacifism or nonviolent resistance, on the one hand, and the just war, on the other. Christians cannot permit their language of faith to be coopted by our political leaders, even if the President is a born-again Christian who knows the life-transforming power of God. Unlike the modern news reporters in Afghanistan and Iraq, Christians must not allow their language to be “embedded” with the political and military leaders to provide them with a justification for a crusade. If we do this, we abandon the Lordship of Jesus Christ and his teachings, redemptive work, and eschatological promise.

The dilemma of President Bush's story of personal redemption is that there is a complete disconnect between the Jesus who turned Bush's life around and the Jesus who, in the Sermon on the Mount, enjoined us to
love our enemies. For Bush, discipleship remains a purely personal and private matter. Peacemaking is replaced by nationalism and the Prince of Peace by the Pax Americana. Note: I am not arguing that terrorism (on all sides) must not be stopped by establishing a more just world order; by applying nonviolent economic, political, or legal strategies; or, in the last resort, by force. What I am saying is that the war on terror is not a holy war and that any use of Christian language in this way is a "wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God." Christians should protest the invocation of God's name to justify this war or to suggest that the United States has a privileged place among the nations.

President Bush seems to have little nuance or restraint in his war on terror because he appears not to have enough humility (the sin of arrogant pride) to acknowledge how ambiguous all of us are in our participation in the injustices, conflicts, and hatred that divide Americans from the billion inhabitants of the Muslim world. Unlike the humility expressed in President Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, President Bush demonizes the enemy, an act that inhibits self-examination and repentance—two practices central to genuine Christian faith.

The third reason for rejecting the explicitly religious rhetoric of the war on terrorism is that such language is misused by the leader of a secular state. The problem is not that religion has trespassed into the province of government but that government has trespassed into the arena of religion. By framing the war in explicitly religious terms, President Bush has trumped the church, silenced it by coopting its distinctive language, and denuded it of its religious meaning and prophetic power to critique the Administration's decisions. The threat is not that religion has taken over the state but that the state has coopted the authority and power of the church to speak with religious and moral authority at the very moment the churches should be evaluating the actions of the government from the point of view of its faith traditions. This is all the more dangerous when the leader of our secular state is "one of us," a public representative of the church's own faith. By invoking God's name in a holy war, Bush identifies the church's language of holiness, justice, and hope to the state's self-interested language of Pax Americana. In a secular democracy the separation between the language of church and the state exists for the sake of the church as much as for the sake of the state. Both the state and the church must resist the desire of the state to coopt the role, language, and judgments of the church in time of war. Separation allows
the church to speak with its own kind of authority and force in matters of conscience. When God is identified as the God of the state, of secular society, and of civil religion, and not the God of Scripture, Jesus Christ, and the church, the game is over for Christians. We have been coopted and reduced to chaplains of the state. The issue is not the President's personal faith but his use of explicitly religious language as president of a secular democracy.

**A Christian Alternative to the Language of Holy War**

*May our faith redeem the blunder / of believing that our thought / has displaced the grounds for wonder / which the ancient prophets taught. / May our learning curb the error / which unthinking faith can breed / lest we justify some terror / with an antiquated creed.*

Christians are a complex, even ambiguous and ambivalent, people. We are citizens first of the kingdom of God and then of a modern nation state. The Christian basis for opposition to the policies and practices of this Administration in its two wars is not partisan politics. Christians should be "equal opportunity" critics of every administration. We should be opposed to the war on terror as a holy war because we regard membership in the kingdom of God, that is, loyalty to Jesus Christ, as our primary calling. We are baptized into the ministry of Christ as the ministry of reconciliation of the whole world. We are members of a transcendent and universal people of God. We are ultimately loyal to a community that transcends all natural boundaries, interests, goals, and promises. As such, we do not trust in our power to destroy the power of evil in its many forms. We trust in the power of the Resurrection and of the Cross to triumph over the powers of sin and death.

But the church is not a docetic community. We are members of the church as members of churches, which are located in concrete contexts, denominations, and local churches in cities, states, and nations. We are citizens of these states and responsible for their security, interests, and well-being. Our baptism does not preclude a penultimate loyalty to our nation. How we negotiate these double memberships and loyalties is one of the difficult and ambiguous problems of Christian existence when we recognize and acknowledge that we await the Eschaton in a sinful, broken, violent, unjust, and dangerous world. The problem with the President is that he does not seem even to recognize, let alone acknowledge, this double loyalty in which Christians exist. The result is that one loyalty...
collapses into and is then identified with the latter. When that happens, the church loses its identity and evaporates into the nation state.

The most powerful alternative to the Christian story of the redemptive suffering of Christ is the myth of redemptive violence, in which the forces of good vanquish the forces of evil in a righteous war. Our culture, especially our popular culture of television and movies, is dominated by this myth (“Make my day!”). It stands in sharp contrast to the story we retell every Sunday in our worship, especially in the Eucharist. Victory belongs to the Lamb, whose cross is the triumph over the power of sin, suffering, injustice, and death through the power of the Resurrection. This is the language Christians should use in responding to the violence of terrorism, not the language of a holy war between the forces of good and evil. Instead of rage and retaliation at the cruelty of terrorism, the call of the Prince of Peace is to cooperate with the reign of God in building a world order without illusions. We do this not because we are righteous and have the right to lead but because we are called to be a servant and a light to the world.

The call to be aware of the threats of sin, self-righteousness, and pretension applies to me as a critic as much as to the leaders of the current administration in Washington. There is in the Old Testament, in addition to the holy war tradition, a tradition of prophetic realists like Isaiah and Amos, for whom God’s judgment falls on all nations because no nation is more righteous than another. All of us stand under the judgment of God. God’s judgment against the pride of nations (Ps. 2:4) applies to me as a critic of national policies as much as to the drafters of the documents that envision American hegemony. My convictions, conclusions, and decisions may be wrongheaded or misguided. Thank God for God’s mercy on us all.

The reality is that two out of three Americans who attend church at least once a week support President Bush’s war on terror. Although Pope John Paul II; the American Roman Catholic bishops; the National Council of Churches; leaders of Protestant denominations, such as the Episcopal Church and Evangelical Lutheran Church; the United Methodist Council of Bishops; as well as many Jewish and Muslim groups oppose this war, movements opposing the United States’s invasion of Iraq have had little impact on churchgoers, let alone on the American public. So what shall we do in our churches? For me, the pastor’s task is not to make pronouncements about partisan politics. Rather, the most important thing the pastor, appointed to interpret the language of faith, must do in a time of war is to
keep telling the story of the gospel so that it is not the first casualty of the rhetoric of holy war. This means the pastor faces a host of hard decisions Sunday after Sunday. How will I interpret the passages of violence in the Scripture (if the Lectionary committee has not protected me by eliminating them from the lections)? Are such texts part of the gospel or in conflict with it? Do I preach a prophetic sermon so I can “deliver my soul” (Wesley), or is a pastoral sermon the appropriate word in a time of war? What songs do I choose for worship? Do we pray for our troops and their troops, for all troops, or for a day without troops?

The way we answer these very practical questions probably has more impact on the members of our churches, through the power of the Holy Spirit, than do all of the well-formulated pronouncements or sermons or essays for Quarterly Review one could write.

Tyron Inbody is Professor of Theology at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Endnotes
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6. Timothy Demy and Gary Stewart use the holy war tradition in interpreting
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11. H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (NY: Harper &
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15. Walter Wink, Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of
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United Methodist Witness in Times of War: Five Characteristics

ELLEN OTT MARSHALL

As President Bush’s war on terror continues to spread around the globe, critical observers caution against crafting an entire foreign policy based on one word. This warning applies equally to moral reflection. Since September 11, most United States citizens have been willing to grant moral authority to any effort that promises to combat terrorism. We invaded Afghanistan to bring terrorists to justice and root out remaining terrorist cells. Under the Patriot Act, we practice detention without counsel or trial in order to prevent terrorist cells from organizing within our borders. And we invaded Iraq in order to preempt a biological or chemical attack and prevent the Hussein regime from enabling terrorists. As of this writing, at least 7,898 Iraqi civilians have died. Moreover, 432 U.S. soldiers have been killed. Both of these numbers grow daily.

Those who believe that such measures are morally justified by their end no longer deliberate over the means. They assent to all actions that the war on terrorism requires and thus compromise “ethical restraint,” as the Council of Bishops noted in the spring of 2002. This essay retrieves guidance from the Social Principles, resolutions, bishops’ statements, and Wesleyan theology in order to once again discipline our moral reflection about the means of war. Ends justifying means is an expedient approach but not a morally thoughtful one. Nor is it in keeping with a theological tradition that derives its name from attention to method. Although we do not have a dogmatic stance on the question of war, several concerns and recommendations persist in our social teachings such that a certain shape for our witness emerges. Contemporary United Methodist documents prescribe a witness that distinguishes between allegiance to nation and allegiance to God, calls for repentance, never glosses over the sinfulness of war, works for peace, and remains committed to a process that restores the image of God in all creation.

In his 1991 article “John Wesley and War,” Brian Turley describes
Wesley’s conviction that God is the source of all power, including governmental authority. Indeed, according to Turley, “Wesley viewed the state as an instrument of God’s providential love.” This conviction allowed Wesley to speak of perfect love and also to endorse war. We hear similar claims of providential support today. In the wake of September 11, President Bush assured the nation that God not only comforts the victims but also stands with those who seek justice in their name. Attorney General John Ashcroft believes that the Patriot Act is one way the United States government responds to Providence, who has given us responsibility for maintaining freedom. And many people perceive God’s providential love at work in Iraq, liberating an oppressed people.

However, since 1968 United Methodist leadership has cautioned against claims that conflate providence with one nation’s agenda. Our Social Principles and resolutions persistently remind us to distinguish between national interest and God’s love, which extends beyond any national boundaries. “We remind the people and the leaders of all countries that no nation is ultimately sovereign. All nations and people are under the judgment of God. Scripture reminds us that in the eyes of God the welfare of the human race is more precious than the continued existence of any nation.” The 1972 “Bishops’ Call for Peace and the Self-Development of Peoples” further elaborates on this point. Citing “nation worship” as an “enemy of peace,” the bishops call for a “movement from narrow nationalism to global loyalties.” They declare, “If peace is to come, nation worship must be supplanted by the loyalty implicit in the declaration, ‘God so loved the world . . .’”

Ours is not a sectarian posture that calls for withdrawal from the political spheres of life. This is why the Social Principles in the Book of Discipline preface a discussion of political community with the following claim: “While our allegiance to God takes precedence over our allegiance to any state, we acknowledge the vital function of government as a principal vehicle for the ordering of society.” Moreover, the statement continues, “We know ourselves to be responsible to God for social and political life.” However, responsible participation in social and political life does not require assent to every national policy and international endeavor. Two hundred years after Wesley, denominational leadership no longer assumes that their government’s power emanates from God and thus demands passive obedience. Thus, our Social Principles also recognize the importance of civil disobedience. National government does not stand for but
under God's judgment. "Therefore, we recognize the right of individuals to dissent when acting under the constraint of conscience and, after exhausting all legal recourse, to disobey laws deemed to be unjust."13

The first characteristic of contemporary United Methodist witness is to distinguish between God and government. We are called to obey God rather than human beings, to orient our lives toward God's love for the world rather than the interests of one nation, and to resist conflating a national endeavor with the "divine campaign" unfolding.14 This witness is much easier to describe than to embody, because it assumes that we are able to discern God's will and to distinguish it from personal inclinations, political preferences, and the claims of political and religious leaders with whom we prefer to agree. It also calls us to affirm God's love for the whole world at a time when our own sense of vulnerability drives us toward a vision of "us" and "them." And it challenges beliefs that comfort us, primarily that our present course of action is a godly one.

The difficulty of this first characteristic makes the second one even more important. Contemporary United Methodist witness calls for repentance. Consider again a passage from the 1972 bishops' call for peace. God calls us to penitence and new life. In the light of present crisis we are called upon to be "heartily sorry for these our misdoings." We have been vain and self-serving, indifferent to poverty and hunger, insensitive in the face of exploitation and suffering; we have enthroned the values of a materialistic society; we have reflected racist attitudes and participated in racist systems; we have worshipped our native land, had undue faith in military violence, and permitted concepts of "national honor" to take precedence over the well-being of brutalized persons in distant places. Each of us, in the light of misguided loyalties and present apathy, is called upon to pray earnestly the familiar prayer, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."15

Certainly, retrieving a passage like this today sparks debate, especially the italicized portion. Many readers would argue that one need not repent for patriotism or for supporting the use of force when it improves the "well-being of brutalized persons in distant places." Indeed, these readers might cite such passages as further support for Mark Tooley's argument that "[l]eft-wing church leaders have a guilt complex about their own country and about Western Civilization in general. If somebody hates us, then it
must be our fault, and apologies must be offered."16 However, Tooley misrepresents the role of penance in the moral life. It is not an ideologically induced guilt reflex. It is a recognition that the persistence of sin in our personal lives also takes social and structural form. However one analyzes U.S. foreign policy, Christians commonly recognize that we are sinful creatures living in a broken world where contrition is warranted.

Moreover, in the United Methodist tradition, we practice penance in order to have new life. That is, penance is a necessary component of this process of regeneration, begun with justification and culminating in entire sanctification. Long develops this point nicely in Living the Discipline. "We need the practice of honestly confessing to one another," he writes, "risking the intimacy that allows others into our lives to examine our actions. This examination is the practice of penance, and it is at the center of a theology of discipline."17 Long cites Wesley's sermon "The Repentance of Believers" as support for his point. Here, Wesley speaks of two kinds of repentance, that which is necessary at the "gate of religion" and that which is required "in every subsequent stage of our Christian course." Wesley continues, "In this sense, we are to repent after we are justified. And till we do so we can go no farther. For till we are sensible of our disease it admits no cure."

The good news is that such a cure is indeed possible. "You have therefore good reason to believe that [God] is not only able but willing to do this," preached Wesley, "to 'cleanse you from all your filthiness of flesh and spirit,' to 'save you from all your uncleanness.' This is the thing which you now long for: this is the faith which you now particularly need, namely, that the great physician, the lover of my soul, is willing to 'make me clean.'"18 In parallel fashion, two-hundred years later, the bishops describe repentance as a condition for peace because it makes new life possible. "New life based upon an honest awareness of past failures and sin is a requisite for peace within and world peace."19 We will consider the debate over entire sanctification and an analogy to the possibility for peace when we turn to the last characteristic of this witness. For now, the point is that repentance is requisite for Christian growth, as understood by Wesley, and requisite for responsible living and peace, according to the contemporary United Methodist Church. Even in the most fearful of times, when we want to protect ourselves by looking outward and scrutinizing the actions of others, we are called to self-assessment. This is the spirit in which the General Board of Church and Society called on United Methodist congre-
gations in 2001 to "study the root causes of terrorism [and] the history of Western involvement in the Middle East." Such reflection and study are part of our necessary self-examination, a penitential practice that is the second characteristic of United Methodist witness.

This statement also contains another suggestion, which points toward the third characteristic of contemporary United Methodist witness: "Reflect upon what our Church has declared—that war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ." This position on the incompatibility of war and gospel made its way into our Social Principles in 1968, when the Methodists merged with the Evangelical United Brethren. Since that time, Stephen Long argues, we have been constitutionally (though not practically) pacifist. In other words, Long's argument is that a Christian cannot condone something that she or he believes to be contrary to the teachings and example of Christ. However, The United Methodist Church does not require its members to be pacifist or to refuse to serve in the military. Rather, the Social Principles accommodate pacifist and just war positions and call on pastors to counsel those contemplating conscientious objection and military service. Consider these words from the Book of Discipline.

From the beginning, the Christian conscience has struggled with the harsh realities of violence and war, for these evils clearly frustrate God's loving purposes for humankind. We yearn for the day when there will be no more war and people will live together in peace and justice. Some of us believe that war, and other acts of violence, are never acceptable to Christians. We also acknowledge that most Christians regretfully realize that, when peaceful alternatives have failed, the force of arms may be preferable to unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide. We honor the witness of pacifists who will not allow us to become complacent about war and violence. We also respect those who support the use of force, but only in extreme situations and only when the need is clear beyond reasonable doubt, and through appropriate international organizations.

In his historical review of such statements, Long considers several reasons for declaring war incompatible with Christ's teachings and still respecting those who support it. He concludes that the church has adopted this accommodating posture out of a commitment to civilization and the individual conscience. In other words, rather than adopt the sectarian
posture of radical pacifists, for example. The United Methodist Church has chosen to remain engaged in civil society and therefore has modified more radical positions in order to allow for cultural differences. And, in keeping with the ideals of a democratic society, the church has prized individual conscience. Thus, our denomination’s statements resist compulsory service in the military as well as a dogmatic posture on the question of war. In Long’s assessment, The United Methodist Church has so cherished its commitment to civilization and the individual conscience that it has disciplined its members to resist discipline. He concludes that our openness toward pacifism and just war positions is “logical, but still not faithful.”

Theodore Weber argues that this openness is a reflection of John Wesley’s own practice, which “was to allow pluralism within the movement on this particular question, and not to enforce his own position or exclude others.” Weber notes the oft-cited passages from Wesley’s “Doctrine of Original Sin” that testify to his visceral disdain for war and his understanding that war is a consequence of sin. However, according to Weber, Wesley did not categorize war as in itself sin. If he had done so, says Weber, then Wesley “would have had to add it to the catalog of acts to be avoided.” Furthermore, he would have named pacifism as part of the process toward perfection. “That would mean that no Methodist Christian—even by the grace of God—could recover the moral image of God and thereby become holy without becoming a pacifist.” Wesley did neither of these things. Nor did he, apparently, discourage the divergent views of other Methodist leaders, such as John Nelson, one of Wesley’s preachers who cited pacifist reasoning for refusing conscription, and John Fletcher, whose views bordered on crusade language. Moreover, in his visits with and ministry to men in the military, Wesley did not chide them for sinful participation in war. According to Weber (and Brian Turley agrees), Wesley’s position on war most closely coincided with a just war stance. He preferred that war be avoided but admitted such a thing as a “just cause” and insisted upon right intention and several other just war criteria. However, he does not seem to have required this position of his followers. A Methodist could remain pacifist. Indeed, in Weber’s assessment, Wesley “placed attitudes toward war in the category of opinions on which Christians may differ sincerely.” Therefore, it does seem fitting that The United Methodist Church today should aim to “hold within its fellowship persons who sincerely differ at this point of critical decision.”
However, I am not suggesting that we name openness to pacifist and just war positions as the third characteristic of United Methodist witness. Regardless of whether such a view is a feature of our accommodationist development or a reflection of our founder, it does not serve to distinguish Methodist witness in a particularly helpful way. But back in the resolutions, we find a persistent phrase that does serve to shape the response of pacifists and just war theorists alike. Every four years, the Book of Resolutions affirms a historic statement from 1968. The statement begins with the recognition of individual conscience and ends with the above-quoted assertion that we "hold within its fellowship persons who sincerely differ" on the question of war and military service. In the middle, however, is a remarkable sentence. "What the Christian citizen may not do is to obey persons rather than God, or overlook the degree of compromise in even our best acts, or gloss over the sinfulness of war."

This bottom line rings prophetic today. In a time when American flags stand next to the Cross, we are reminded that we are to obey God rather than persons. In a time when our nation aims to protect the vulnerable, we are reminded that we cannot overlook the degree of compromise in even our best acts. In a time when the momentum to war is so great that those who oppose it find it necessary to justify themselves, we are reminded that we cannot gloss over the sinfulness of war. The starting point for moral reflection on the question of war must always be that killing is wrong. Pacifists and just war theorists agree on that. The onus rests with those who support killing to make their case for it. One sign that the momentum to war has outpaced moral reflection is that this stance has been reversed. When United Methodists remind society of the sinfulness of war, we demand the necessary moral pause and renewed assessment of these irreparable acts. Though United Methodist witness holds fellowship with persons who sincerely differ, it may not gloss over the sinfulness of war.

The fourth characteristic of contemporary United Methodist witness is to work for peace. Since the 1972 "Bishops' Call for Peace and the Self-Development of Peoples," our social teachings have assumed a broad notion of peace and concrete tasks for peacemaking.

Peace is not simply the absence of war—a nuclear stalemate or combination of uneasy cease-fires. It is that emerging dynamic reality envisioned by prophets where spears and swords give way to implements of peace (Isa. 2:1-4); where
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historic antagonists dwell together in trust (Isa. 11:4-11); and where righteousness and justice prevail. There will be no peace with justice until unselfish and informed love is structured into political processes and international arrangements.31

Ours is a notion of positive peace, rather than negative peace, where peace requires the presence of justice rather than only the absence of war. This is not a place where people avoid conflict, overlook points of tension, or suppress freedom in the name of order and agreement. Rather, the bishops name and address the root causes of war, or “enemies of peace,” such as blind self-interest, economic exploitation, racism, population explosion, nation worship, “continued reliance upon military violence,” and the arms race. “If war results from greed, ambition, and sinful self-interest,” the bishops continue, “peace requires the literal conversion of persons, of attitudes and of values. It also requires a radical redefinition of institutional goals and priorities.” Because the causes of war and forms of violence are myriad and the path to peace is rigorous, the bishops call on all people to “assume their full responsibility for peacemaking.”32

The more recent “Statement to the Church on the Terrorist Attacks and the U.S. Response” (2001), cited a few times already, recommends actions for peace that reflect a similar concern about interpersonal relationships, intercultural exchanges, and political engagement. In addition to the call to study the Social Principles and the root causes of terrorism, the General Board of Church and Society also invites congregations to pray for all who “suffer and mourn, and for those who serve” to be “bridge-builders” between Christians and persons of other faiths, and to be hospitable toward “Arabs, Muslims, and all others in [the] community who may suffer at this time from acts of hatred and prejudice.” We are also encouraged to contact our representatives to urge an “end to all violence and war,” to encourage cooperation with the United Nations, and to establish a permanent International Criminal Court. The final recommendation is to continue support for the United Methodist Committee on Relief, which provides assistance to Afghani refugees and victims of the 9-11 attacks at home.

It is important to see how exacting the United Methodist witness to peacemaking is. The leadership does not offer vague images or generalized tasks. Rather, their guidance reflects serious engagement with the particular concerns of the day and concrete actions intended to address them.
The United Methodist peacemaking witness seeks to be well informed, active, and attentive to the personal and political dimensions of this task.

In the 1968 Book of Discipline, the section on “War and Peace” includes the following words.

The Church also believes that a warless world is the ideal toward which all men and all nations should strive; that such an order is possible if men will follow the way of him who is the Prince of peace; and that it is therefore the duty of every Christian to promote peace and good will, and to foster the spirit of understanding, mutual trust and cooperation among all the peoples and nations of the world.23

Although the language of a peaceable ideal and the call to duty persist, the promise that “such an order is possible” did not make it even to 1972. This observation carries us to the fifth characteristic and into a discussion that will make the United Methodist position on war seem cut and dried. Can the United Methodist witness affirm that we are laboring on a task that is achievable? To put it more directly, is peace possible?

As mentioned earlier, Weber argues that if Wesley had categorized war as a sin, he would have placed pacifism as a necessary element on the path to perfection. Although Wesley did not do this, some contemporary United Methodists have. For example, Stephen Long argues quite convincingly that the contemporary church deems war a sin insofar as it is contrary to the teaching and example of Christ. War, therefore, is one of the illnesses that we must name in order for the great physician to heal us. And, Long continues, the Methodist tradition understands healing to be possible. He writes, “The salvation that comes to us in Jesus is a salvation that over­comes sin.”24 We are not fated to war but freed for peace. Therefore, Long perceives a great departure from Wesley when we identify a sin and yet condone participation in it. “When we claim that war is contrary to the spirit and gospel of Christ, but do not expect people to respond by refusing to participate in war, we understand justification only as imputation of righteousness and neglect the sanctifying grace that works the righteous­ness of the law within us.”25 In his view, peaceableness is part of the journey to perfection. Each time we compromise this commitment and deem an act of violence as necessary, we reveal our lack of faith in the process of sanctification.
This argument is extremely valuable because it challenges the "eschatological reservation" that declares peace to be impossible this side of heaven. The eschatological reservation pervades our thinking about war and peace and does seem to reflect a realistic assessment of the world in all of its brokenness. But it also places a limit on our hope and, consequently, on our commitment to peaceful means. That is, we are more likely to compromise a commitment when the goal seems unreachable. Indeed, once a goal moves out of reach, conforming our behavior toward it is irresponsible. This is one of the key arguments against pacifism—that the principled stance against the use of violence is irresponsible in a world that requires force to prevent greater evil. However, Wesley's view of sanctification calls such boundaries into question. Our growth is not capped at a certain point, even this side of heaven. Rather, Wesleyans see themselves involved in a process that requires a life disciplined toward the goal of holiness. As John Cobb notes, Wesley was well aware of the possibility for this to yield self-righteousness. "But this did not cause him to abandon his emphasis on perfect love. Far worse than this risk, he was convinced, was depicting the Christian life in such a way that believers would rest content with the struggles that characterize its early stages or, worse, decide that a bit of sinning was acceptable as long as one could rely on God's pardon." Therefore, by applying Wesley's doctrine of perfection to the question of war and peace, Long creates a strong case for pacifist commitment.

However, Long's argument asks us to accept two premises: that war is indeed a sin and that entire sanctification is achievable. As we have seen, the first claim is debated in our denomination. Pacifists among us reference Wesley's "Doctrine of Original Sin" and his criticism of attempts to justify war. They insist that war is indeed contrary to the teaching of Christ, who called us not to resist the evildoer. And they describe war as sin because it alienates us from other human beings and inevitably destroys the lives of innocents. Just war theorists among us argue that "all war is tragedy, but not all war is sin." They may also reference Wesley's "Doctrine of Original Sin" to argue that war is a consequence of sin, but not in itself a sin. And they insist that we follow Jesus' teaching to love our neighbor when we protect him or her from harm, even if that protection requires force. Both positions can be justified by selecting appropriate passages from Wesley, and both positions can find room in contemporary United Methodist social teachings.
United Methodists also debate Long's second premise—that entire sanctification is achievable in this life. As Cobb explains, entire sanctification "completes the process begun with the new birth. In the new birth the Spirit assumes dominance in the believer. In entire sanctification the Spirit removes the root of sin, that is, all in the believer that has continued to resist God." Theodore Runyon also picks up on Wesley's substantialist notion of sin and the belief that this substance can indeed be rooted out in the process of perfection, although even the person who reaches entire sanctification is not immune to temptation. However, Runyon also draws on Albert Outler's distinction between "the Western Latin translation as perfectio (perfected perfection), an achieved state of perfection" and "teleiotes (perfecting perfection) in the Eastern tradition, a never ending aspiration for all of love's fullness." Outler insists that the latter concept had greater influence on Wesley, prompting him to emphasize the process of regeneration rather than the endpoint of entire sanctification, a state which Wesley himself did not claim to have reached.

The emphasis on the process rather than the promise of completion does not neutralize the power of Long's argument. In the Wesleyan tradition, we are called to the process as much as to the end. One may or may not believe that perfection is achievable, but one must recognize that justification begins a process to which one must remain committed, a process of restoring the image of God. Similarly, one may or may not categorize war as sin, but one must recognize the sinfulness inherent in the practice of war, the suffering and hatred that inhibit the restoration of God's image. The practical import of Long's argument echoes the pragmatic value of Wesley's doctrine, namely, that it increases our sense of possibility. In Runyon's words, "the greatest strength of the Wesleyan doctrine of perfection may lie in its ability to mobilize believers to seek a more perfect future that surpasses the present. It turns the Christian life into a project constantly open to new possibilities."

Contemporary United Methodist witness does not rely on the promise that a more perfect future will be realized in our lifetime. Rather, it remains committed to a process of restoring the image of God in human beings and in all creation. Ours is a theology of discipline in which, like the cathedral builders, we labor on behalf of a vision, whether or not completion is within our grasp. The greatest difference between Wesleyans and Christian realists, and the greatest strength for a United Methodist witness
to peace in these difficult times, is that we perceive life to be in process, not in paradox. We do not understand ourselves to be hemmed in between sin and salvation, necessity and freedom. Rather, we see our lives on a path from the former to the latter. Therefore, sinful acts cannot be accommodated because we occupy a certain state of existence. They must be replaced with loving acts, lest they impede our progress. Thus, the fifth characteristic of contemporary United Methodist witness is that even in the darkest of times we remain committed to a process that restores the image of God in all creation.

In order to represent this tradition faithfully, we do need to recognize the different opinions that find a home here and to acknowledge the ambiguities in our historical and contemporary teachings that allow for such plurality. However, we must also declare that the United Methodist tradition is not a place where anything goes. This is a place where means matter, where process is important, and where moral reflection must be disciplined. In this article, I identified five characteristics of contemporary witness in times of war. Some characteristics emerge directly from contemporary social teachings; some contain contradictions between historical and contemporary positions; and some are more firmly rooted in history. However, all of them persist with tenacity in the living tradition of our denomination. They are also helpful reminders of who we are and what we can offer to a society swept up in war. To this society, contemporary United Methodists must discern between allegiance to nation and allegiance to God, practice repentance, never gloss over the sinfulness of war, work for peace, and remain committed to a process that restores the image of God in all creation.

Ellen Ott Marshall is Associate Professor of Ethics at Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, California.

Endnotes

1. I am deeply grateful to my diligent research assistant, Lara Bruce, a second-year M.Div. student at the Claremont School of Theology.
2. This statistic comes from Iraq Body Count, a database compiled by researchers in the United States and the United Kingdom, who tabulate injuries and deaths from multiple media reports. Obtained on 23 November 2003 at http://www.iraqbodycount.net.
5. I owe this approach to Stephen Long's text Living the Discipline. Long argues that in our effort to remain culturally relevant United Methodists have lost theological discipline. See Living the Discipline: United Methodist Theological Reflections on War, Civilization, and Holiness (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).
8. See, for example, President Bush's "Remarks by the President of the United States at the National Prayer Service." Obtained through CNN.com on 21 July 2003.
15. "Bishops' Call." 13 (emphasis mine).
17. Long, Living the Discipline, 102.
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_Living the Discipline_, 102-03.


25. Ibid., 364.

26. Ibid., 365.

27. Ibid., 354.

28. Ibid., 387 (his emphasis).


32. Ibid., 14, 16.


34. Long, _Living the Discipline_, 96.

35. Ibid., 85.


41. Ibid., 91, 101.

42. Ibid., 228.

Reflections from a War Zone: Jesus' Radical Call to Forgiveness

SANDRA K. OLEWINE

Throughout our lives as we seek to grow in faithful discipleship, striving to put on Christ in all things, many of us have to revisit lessons we thought we had learned. As new experiences confront us, particularly ones that stress or challenge us, we often must wrestle anew with what it means to be disciples in the midst of the world in which we live. As we face new levels of heartache, insecurity, frustration, hurt, or grief, lessons we thought we had learned suddenly seem trivial at best.

Having served through the General Board of Global Ministries as the United Methodist Liaison to Jerusalem for seven years, I have had to come face to face with my own weaknesses and shortcomings in living out the radical call of Christ. Living in an environment of distrust, oppression, occupation, enmity, and terror, especially in the past three-and-a-half years, I find myself having to grapple especially with Christ’s call to forgive as God has forgiven me and to love my “enemy” in ways I could never have imagined. The bar has been set higher and the struggle to reflect Christ through a forgiving and loving life has become all the more difficult. No longer distant, theoretical topics, the realities of love and hate, forgiveness and justice, neighbors and enemies are set before me daily. Yet, to self-consciously and intentionally live as a Christian in today’s world, I cannot ignore the call of Jesus—the call of the God of all creation—to walk a different way in the world.

Figuring out what that different way is and how to embody it is with me constantly. In the many months of sneaking through the streets of Bethlehem attempting to get from home to the office at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church while the city was under continuous twenty-four-hour curfew; playing cat and mouse with Israeli jeeps, armored personnel carriers, or tanks as they fired tear gas, sound bombs, machine guns, or shells; walking on the streets of Jerusalem when a Palestinian detonated a suicide bomb—I have had to wrestle with how to transform my own rage at the oppression and violence around me into constructive, Christ-
like action. I have had to confront boldly Jesus' call to forgive as I have been forgiven.

As my eyes move from the context in which I live to the horizons both near and far, I am convinced that those of us who strive to follow Christ cannot ignore this foundational concept of the gospel. We may come up with different answers on how best to live out that call, but we cannot escape the responsibility to wrestle with forgiveness in the face of the reality of terrorism, whether perpetrated by militant groups or by nation states. We cannot afford to hide behind personal formulations of faithfulness that place the matters of public life beyond our considerations or notions of nationalistic identities or agendas above the gospel's message. If we do, we would threaten to make Christianity, at the very least, meaningless in a world yearning for meaning and, at worst, part of our rationale for using "any and all means at our disposal" to fight terror and war.

In the midst of this struggle to figure out how to live faithfully in a violent world, particularly growing out of my experience of living almost daily in the midst of both state and militant terror, I have come to understand that implicit in Jesus' call to be peacemakers and to love our enemies is the call to live in a state of forgiveness. This awareness transformed my understanding of forgiveness. Before, I saw it as primarily a specific action, something that we do in response to an act or a person. Individual or corporate acts of forgiveness are of course still critical. There are real wrongs of which we must learn to let go, and forgiveness opens the door to allowing that to happen. But I sense that more importantly Jesus is calling us to a new way of being, a way of engaging the world every day. We live in a state of forgiveness that God has created for us in merciful love, and as we live more deeply into that reality, we are changed and so our response to the world around us changes. We are offered the opportunity to develop a spirit of forgiveness, transforming the way we respond to wrongs, real or perceived, great or small, from the very start. We may or may not have actually reached a place where we have forgiven someone, but as we strive to reach that point, we still are called to live in a spirit of forgiveness. I know people who have embodied this way of life and I am convinced that at the core of living nonviolently in our world is the need to develop such a spirit. What exactly does this mean?

On the eve of the first strike on Iraq in March 2003, a poem called "Night Vision" circulated through the Internet:
We enter again
a dark age.
Mongrel hoards
are poised at borders
ready
to be at it again.
the killing,
the destruction.

The arrogance of power
snuffs out
the light of diplomacy,
draws a dark drape
over the conference of nations.

We wait helpless
as night falls.
impenetrable,
a smothering weight.

How many will die?

It is a terrible thing
to be wide awake
in the darkness.1

"It is a terrible thing to be wide awake in the darkness." We have all
known nights when sleep would not come, when it seemed forever before
daylight dawned. Whether our wakefulness was due to watching over the
deathbed of a loved one, worrying about a family member's life choices, or
having to huddle under stairways waiting for bombing to pass—most
people have known the pain and even the agony of facing the darkness.

Yet, the gospel lessons about forgiveness and love show that this is
what living in a state of forgiveness means. Being wide awake in the dark­ness is exactly what we are called in faith to be. We are summoned to stay
awake, to keep watch, to hold out a light until the night passes. In other
words, we are to keep vigil until the reign of God breaks forth in its full-
A vigil is a time of intense wakefulness. The Bible is full of stories about people keeping watch, especially during times of great difficulty. In the Christian tradition, these stories are experiences in which we become aware of God's presence—basically, we are watching God watching us. In her book *A Candle at Midnight*, Marcy Heidish observes that keeping vigil is a "spiritual way to face life's stretches of difficulty, uncertainty, and waiting... A vigil is an offering of your time and presence to be especially aware of God."

In Luke 9:51-62, Jesus is preparing to begin his journey toward Jerusalem. As this story opens, he has just been rejected from a Samaritan village because he is set on going to the city. After going on, three people approach Jesus to say they want to follow him. In response, Jesus offers to each not encouragement or praise but a difficult word. There is no pat on the back, no call to celebrate; rather, Jesus reminds them that the work ahead is serious and requires total commitment. It is almost as if Jesus is so focused on his mission that he has no time for "niceties." It is as if he is saying to them, "Come, follow me, but know that I want and need the whole of who you are." There is an "intense wakefulness" in Jesus' words, a clarity of purpose that comes only from deep listening. Jesus is keeping vigil—intensely aware of where God is and of what God wants; and he is setting out to fulfill his mission as God's Holy One.

The call for us to do the same is upon us in these days. We are living in the midst of seemingly endless darkness now—surrounded by war, arrogance, terror, and destruction. At times, the situation makes us want to hide under the covers, to go to sleep and hope it is better in the morning, to close our ears and eyes to the suffering around us. But for those who would follow Jesus, who would have a spirit of forgiveness until the light breaks forth, there is no such option. In knowing that we are being forgiven by God for all the ways we fall short and in realizing that God is still working through and with us to transform all creation, we are to be forgiving toward others and to continue to work with them as partners with God in healing creation, even when we haven't actually forgiven those others.

I have discovered three aspects of living in a state of forgiveness: prayerful silence, prayerful speaking, and prayerful action. I have encountered people who have challenged and inspired me in all three; and after living deeply within a time of terror, sharing their stories is a means of illustrating what I believe we are called to be in the world.
First, living in a state of forgiveness means to be involved in prayerful silence, to listen for the voice of God in our midst. On a personal level, this is often not an easy task. The pain that comes from being “sinned against” cuts deep. Listening for God’s voice and seeking direction about how to respond when we have been wronged can be a struggle. When that experience involves the murder of loved ones, regardless of the method, the anger increases. However, when a loved one has been taken by an act of terror, grief and anger are often combined with a sense of deep insecurity and fear. There is a gut reaction to strike back, to retaliate for the pain of the loss. That is why when people who have faced such anguish respond from a different ethic, it seems surprising to outsiders.

Many people were amazed when some of the American families of the victims of the Pentagon and the World Trade Center attacks participated in vigils that called on the government to find peaceful means for holding those responsible accountable. They did not want our country to cause harm in the name of their loved ones, especially to innocent people in a far-off land. Had each of these families already forgiven the perpetrators? Surely not—it was too soon after the attack. But in the midst of their shock and grief, their call was a true act of courage. Surely, the desire not to increase harm, especially in the midst of one’s own loss, grows out of listening for the voice of God in the silence of grief and fear. It is a remarkable gift to the human family.

I saw a similar ethic at work in Beit Sahour, the village just east of Bethlehem. There, a carpenter named Joseph had his home near the Shedma Israeli Military Camp. Throughout late 2000 and early 2001 it was shelled again and again. The shelling on Easter Sunday night, 2001, finally destroyed his part of the house. During these months, I accompanied numerous groups to meet with Joseph and his family, walking through the various stages of destruction and rubble. During Holy Week, just days before the final destruction, he shared with one such gathering about his and his family’s experience. What amazed us was that Joseph never referred to the soldiers at the camp as his enemies. Even as we climbed through the rubble of his life’s work, he never displayed any sense of bitterness or hatred. It seemed unbelievable—a miracle, really—that in the midst of all this loss, there was no loathing. There was only a quiet man, who continued to refer to the soldiers who had destroyed his home as his neighbors. He said,
I don't understand why they had to destroy my house. They know me and my family. We've lived side by side for years. We want to live in peace. I don't want my children to hate Israelis. It is hard to help them understand when everything they know has been destroyed. But I still want to live in peace, to be neighbors again. It is the only way.

The families of the U.S. victims and Joseph of Beit Sahour are living examples that the way of being of forgiveness is possible, even in the midst of overwhelming loss and tragedy. Does this mean that those that wrong us, either on a personal or global level, are to be left to their own devices? Of course not. Holding people accountable for their actions is a part of loving them. But living in a state of forgiveness—prayerfully listening—means carefully weighing how one holds perpetrators accountable. God's justice is infused with mercy—we too must find ways of implementing justice that help keep us from actually seeking revenge or retribution. Living in a state of forgiveness means seeking justice in ways that restore the victims and the perpetrators to right relation, where that is possible. Where restoring relationships is not possible, we need to do all in our power to not increase the harm done by our own search for justice or security. This is a divine goal not easily put into practice. Just because it is difficult does not let us off the hook; we need to wrestle with how we might approximate that reality.

Second, living in a state of forgiveness means being involved in prayerful speaking—confronting wrongful use of power and might with words of truth in the name of the God of light and life. For many people in the United States, terror was a far-off phenomenon prior to September 2001. It was something that happened to people in other parts of the world, but not here. Even after the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, once we learned that those accused and ultimately found guilty for the act were Anglo-Americans, the insecurity and fear seemed to dissipate. But on September 11, 2001, when a group of men from Saudi Arabia and Egypt turned passenger jetliners into guided missiles, a new fear and a new level of insecurity grabbed hold of many of those who, before, had felt relatively safe.

For the thousands of families and friends personally affected by the death of loved ones, the grief and shock were overwhelming. People in many different countries and from numerous faith backgrounds (or from none) had to grapple with the gut-wrenching news that they would never see their loved ones again. Across the United States, people were trauma-
tized by the brutality of these attacks. While the attacks happened on U.S. soil, people the world over, though, felt a new sense of insecurity. If this could happen in the US, it could happen anywhere. There was a global cry, lead by the U.S., to find those responsible and to stop their ability to repeat such attacks—a justifiable and legitimate demand.

While the experience of feeling threatened was new for many people in North America, for many others the sense of insecurity and fear experienced by the world that day only reminded them of their daily reality. Whether living in a place wracked by the violence of war or state and/or militant terrorism, the reality that we live in a world over which we have little control was nothing new.

September 11 offers an opportunity to connect to the suffering of the majority of the world’s people. It also offers an opportunity for those of us living in the most powerful nation in the world to look inward to see how our actions may have contributed to the contexts of violence and rage. After 9/11, calls for understanding the context out of which the perpetrators came was often seen as being supportive of terrorism or as naive soft-heartedness. But surely this is shortsightedness at its worst. Jesus’ radical call to forgiveness means that the powerful, even in the midst of our grief, must take stock of how we live in the world and honestly examine how we might have participated in creating a terrorized world. Self-critical reflection is essential if we long to eradicate violence from our midst. Living in a state of forgiveness means having the courage to look at ourselves, to listen to words of critique, and to have the courage to seek forgiveness while we are seeking to forgive others.

Many people around the world who daily live with uncertainty and insecurity expressed hope that Americans would become more aware of their connectedness to other people and understand in a deeper way how devastating insecurity is. Many Americans did. Discussion about how our lifestyles and foreign policies have played a role in the inequality in the world occurred across numerous communities. However, what we heard increasingly from national policy circles and from numerous religious groups was not encouragement to understand more deeply the experience of others but rather to see ourselves more and more as the victim. While seeking to call those responsible to account, there was little call for reflection on how our policies may have contributed to the state of the world today. Our right to defend our way of life, seemingly at all cost, was our...
duty and prerogative. Asking whether our way of life had anything to do with what precipitated the attacks was frowned upon, to say the least. Holding those responsible for these crimes accountable and being self-critical were too often seen as mutually exclusive.

As the war on Iraq was launched, countless numbers of people spoke on behalf of those who do live daily in an insecure world. While recognizing the horror and assault that the U.S. had experienced and acknowledging the grief and loss, they dared to speak a word of loving critique to our leaders. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), was one such voice. He wrote on the eve of the war in Iraq:

The pre-emptive military attack against Iraq is immoral, illegal and ill-advised. The WCC and its member churches repeatedly warned these powers that this war will have grave humanitarian consequences, including loss of civilian life, large-scale displacement of people, environmental destruction and further destabilisation of the whole region.

The implicit unilateralism, by the US, the UK and Spain, contradict the spirit, ideal and prospect of multilateralism, the fundamental principles laid out in the UN Charter, and may damage hopes to create a strong international order in the post-Cold War period. By relying on the right of the powerful, including the use of threat and economic pressure, to influence other states to support their action, these countries undermine international rule of law that has taken half a century to construct.

The response from churches against the war in Iraq has been an unprecedented manifestation of unanimity. The energy that has been released bears witness to a spirituality that calls for peaceful coexistence of all nations and peoples in accordance with the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. That energy must not be lost. Churches should continue their united efforts to stop the war, to give assistance to those in need and to cooperate with people of other faiths, especially Muslims, to restore confidence and trust amongst the nations of the world.

As followers of Jesus, being wide awake in the darkness means having the courage to speak the truth to power, to name sin or evil for what it is and where it is. It also means having the courage to listen to those who speak such words to us out of concern for our well-being. We are called to hold the light of God up to our personal and corporate actions so that all
my wrestle more earnestly with what God requires. I have had to receive such words on many occasions when I visited Palestinian families after attacks by the Israeli military. They would hold up pieces of rockets or guided missiles that were made in the USA and say to me, “This is the gift of your government to my family.” Living in a state of forgiveness requires having the humility to listen to such words, to receive them, consider them carefully, and incorporate them in our responses as necessary. Even as we are seeking to forgive others and hold them accountable for their actions, this must take place within us if we want to live in a state of forgiveness.

Last, to live in a state of forgiveness means keeping vigil through prayerful action. In Ps. 34:14 we are called upon to “depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” When in Luke 9:51-62 the people asked Jesus for time to take care of personal business before they followed him, he rebuked them. To follow, he insisted, is to go forth immediately to proclaim the reign of God, to pursue it actively, thoroughly, and intensely.

This is not always easy. I know what it is to be overcome by rage from the insecurity around me; and figuring out how I could reflect Christ in my world seems impossible. On such days, there is little forgiveness in my heart. Yet, invariably, in such times I encounter people who challenge me to trust not only that I could but also that I must dare to be bold in faith. Living in a state of forgiveness demands that I actively engage the world and seek to do that which is most difficult—finding ways to love my “enemy.”

I have learned a lot from my neighbors in Israel and Palestine about what it is to have this kind of bold faith. I have learned the same from my Muslim and Jewish friends there. A Palestinian named Ghazi Brigit and an Israeli named Yitzhak Frankenthal are powerful examples. Both belong to a group called the Israeli-Palestinian Bereaved Families for Peace, a circle of families who have lost loved ones to the violence, the terrorism, perpetrated by the other. This group has taken the difficult step of seeking healing by stretching their arms out to “the enemy” and searching for a way to end the terror so that both might live in peace and security.

In spring 2002, the two men made a trip to the United States. In preparation, they wrote a joint statement called “The Argument of the Coffins.”

We have every reason to despise each other, to be mortal enemies. One of us is an Israeli whose son was kidnapped and killed five years ago by Hamas. The other is a Palestinian whose brother was killed by Israeli troops at a checkpoint.
in his village. But our grief has united us behind the same goal. As part of a
delegation representing 350 Palestinian and Israeli families whose loved ones
were killed in the blood feud between our peoples, we will travel to the U.S. . . .
to plead with the Bush Administration, the UN and the European Union to
stop the insane violence that our leaders are unable—or unwilling to—prevent.
Many parents who have lost sons and daughters in this conflict are angry and
demand revenge. We are no less angry at those who took our loved ones away,
but we demand peace and reconciliation. We are not diplomats, politicians or
“experts” on the Middle East. We are experts on the price paid by relatives of
more than 1400 Palestinians and Israelis killed in this conflict since the intifada
began in September 2000. But we understand that our leaders are offering no
solutions, no paths out of the current darkness and back to the negotiating
table. But, if we, of all people, can put aside our bitterness and reach agree­
ment and work together, our leaders have no excuse not to try.

We will assemble more than 1,000 coffins at the UN in New York City on
March 19th. The coffins represent those who have paid the price for the
absence of peace. We want to prevent others from joining their ranks. This
display, we hope, will be more convincing than all of the familiar analyses that
explain why nothing can be done. For years, we have both heard the same polit­
ical, historical and demographic reasons why this conflict is too complicated to
solve. The horrible reality of the coffins shows that these are not good reasons;
they are bad excuses. In these awful times, Palestinians, Israelis and Americans
who care about our region are becoming numb. They cannot bear to think
about the individual tragedies, the individual people who have been slaugh­
tered. We insist that they remember. Because no other argument for peace and
sanity seems to be working, we will make the argument of the coffins.

Ghazi and Yitzhak crossed the chasm of hatred and anger, and in the
midst of grief embraced “the enemy” in order to find solace, strength, and
hope. They gave themselves to create a different future for both peoples.
They honored their loved ones by daring to love others. Even in the midst
of ongoing violence, when both Palestinian and Israeli families were losing
loved ones, these men dared to demand peace and reconciliation rather
than revenge. This is certainly a glimpse into what it means to live in a state
of forgiveness. When I ponder Jesus’ call to love our enemies, I find in these
witnesses a compelling example. If they can do such things, so can we. For
those of us who claim to follow the Prince of Peace, can we do any less?
Another example of such forgiveness occurred in March 2003. Alongside the Iraqis huddled in Baghdad under the terrifying blitz of bombs, a number of internationals arrived to stand alongside the millions of innocent men, women, and children there. Charlie Liteky, 72, is a former Roman Catholic priest and Vietnam war hero who was awarded the congressional Medal of Honor for crawling under volleys of gunfire in 1967 to rescue twenty-three injured U.S. soldiers. While he is afraid of war, his biggest fear is for the children. "I don't have a death wish," he said in an interview. "I have everything to live for. I have a wonderful wife and a wonderful life back home." But he felt compelled to at least try to quell the inevitable trembling of the children. "When the attack comes," he said, "the most beautiful thing that can happen for me is if I am permitted to be at the orphanage. At least I could pick the children up, hold them, and try to let my calm and love transfer to them." Ramzi Kysia, a member of the Iraq Peace Team, wrote,

Peace is not an abstract value that we should just quietly express a hope for. It takes work. It takes courage. It takes joy. Peace takes risks. War is catastrophe. It is terrorism on a truly massive scale. It is the physical, political and spiritual devastation of entire peoples. Thuraya, a young girl in Baghdad, wrote in her diary: "We don't know what is going to happen. We might die, and maybe we are living our last days in life. I hope that everyone who reads my diary remembers me and knows that there was an Iraqi girl who had many dreams in her life."

Dream with us of a world where we do not let violence rule our lives... Peace is not an abstract concept. We are a concrete, tangible reality. We, the peoples of our common world, through the relationships we build with each other and the risks we take for one another, we are peace.

Some people saw these internationals, most of them American citizens, as stupid or even as traitors to our country. They saw their witness as an act that betrayed the lives of U.S. soldiers who were being sent to fight. But these people did not go there to take up arms against the soldiers of the Coalition forces or to dishonor them. They went to let the Iraqi people know that not all Americans felt that war was the way to find an answer to the various forms of terror in our world. They were willing to risk their lives to accompany the innocent through the horrors of bombing and war. They engaged in prayerful action that is the cornerstone of living in a state
of forgiveness. They sought a different way to express their connection to the whole human family. Prayerful action does not necessarily mean that we have to do exactly as these persons have done. In fact, these specific actions may cause us great turmoil. But to live in a state of forgiveness is to at least seek to do the best we can where we are with what God has given us, whether near at home or around the world, to wrestle deeply with what it means to love God and enemy.

Jesus’ radical call to forgiveness is not easy from the midst of a war zone. It is far easier to choose sides, to seek our security, to silence dissenting voices, to close ourselves off from the humanity of others. But the stories I have shared have challenged me to reflect more deeply on that call as a Christian in the world. They have provoked me to wrestle with what it means to forgive as God has forgiven me. Like Jacob, my engagement with such people has stretched me beyond my physical limits. Many times I have found myself not able to live up to such examples. But, at the end of the day, I have come to believe that only through such wrestling can we begin to embody Jesus’ call to forgive as we have been forgiven. By keeping watch through prayerful silence, prayerful speaking, and prayerful action until God’s reign comes fully to earth as it is in heaven—even while we are struggling to forgive or to be forgiven—we can be part of the healing of creation, doing no harm and seeking the well-being of all. Then we will, at least in part, begin to live in a state of forgiveness.

Sandra K. Olewine serves as the General Board of Global Ministries United Methodist Liaison to Jerusalem in cooperation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and Jerusalem.

Endnotes
1. This poem is attributed to Bonnie Thurston, who lived in Beirut for a number of years.
5. These stories came from the Iraq Peace team email group in March 2003.
The Military Chaplain in Time of War: Contours and Content of Ministry

ROBERT PHILLIPS

The recent war in Iraq has highlighted one of the historic extension ministries of The United Methodist Church, that of the military chaplain. Nearly two-hundred elders, representing most of the annual conferences of the church, serve as active-duty chaplains with all branches of the U.S. military. Many more who are appointed to local churches minister as reserve or National Guard chaplains, a number of whom were called to active duty during the recent conflict. Thousands of laity were involved in the conflict in direct or supportive ways, ranging from the political dimension of a President George Bush and a Senator Hillary Clinton to young troops serving directly in harm's way.

This article is not focused on either justifying or questioning the presence of United Methodist clergy serving as military chaplains. That omission does not dismiss the importance of such discussion, which is vital to the process of nurturing the theological integrity of the church's pastoral vision in extension ministry settings. The role of pastor to a local congregation is the first office of the church. The role of chaplain in a secular institution, whether in the military or in other nonreligious settings, is indispensably linked to the fact of ordination but can play out in significantly different ways. Ongoing reflection on these roles is crucial to the spiritual health of clergy who serve in those settings and for the church in whose name they serve.

In this article, I focus on the context and practice of ministry to the men and women of the U.S. military against the background of combat and the war on terrorism. What are the expectations placed on clergy who serve as military chaplains, both by the military and by The United Methodist Church, in combat and crisis situations? How are clergy prepared by the military and the church to meet those expectations? What issues of theology and pastoral care emerge in the midst of ministry in combat?

I begin with a note of caution. This article is suggestive at best. Books
and articles, ranging from the informed to the inane are available to reinforce or repudiate virtually any point of view on military chaplaincy ministry. While I will point toward aspects of the value of military chaplains and to certain theological dangers arising from their place on a battlefield, an in-depth treatment is beyond the scope of this article.

I also acknowledge the human factor. Most civilian clergy tend to be somewhat bewildered or bemused by the handful of colleagues who arrive at annual conference in a military uniform, dressed like bus drivers or ice-cream sellers and often perceived as taking a hiatus from real ministry. I hope that in offering some insights into the threefold issues raised below that ministry colleagues of whatever stripe may find themselves better positioned to understand and to dialogue on the deeper issues raised by the fact of United Methodist clergy ministering in uniform to those engaged in combat roles.

What Is Expected of Military Chaplains?
The U.S. military requires candidates for chaplaincy to be endorsed by a faith group, over two hundred of which are currently recognized for such purposes. The requirement for endorsement serves to maintain the chaplain's accountability to his or her faith tradition and helps to maintain distance between the government and specific religions. No "Lone Ranger" simply can stroll into the recruiting office and sign up as a chaplain. The faith group can withdraw endorsement if it feels the chaplain no longer faithfully reflects its teaching or ethos. Without endorsement the chaplain must immediately depart the military. No other officer community in the military has that quality of dual accountability for continued service. This underscores the military's expectation of its chaplains to have spiritual integrity consistent with the faith-group tradition they represent. Military people are not attracted to "generic clerics." Military members do not respect chaplains who play as Reverend Rambo or Rambolina; they expect their chaplains to be unarmed noncombatants providing a caring presence amid human carnage.

Balancing the affirmation of specific faith-group commitment is the military's expectation that chaplains minister with awareness of the pluralistic nature of the military. During my service as a district superintendent of sorts to Navy chaplains assigned to Marine Corps units in the Far East, my four major subordinate supervisor chaplains were Latter Day Saint, Church of Christ, Orthodox Presbyterian, and Conservative Jew. The mix
of faith groups among the chaplains they supervised is astonishing. Their spirit of collegial, collaborative ministry empowered all the chaplains to freedom and effectiveness in their respective work. Nothing in the vision of a collegial ministry requires any chaplain to renounce or misplace his or her theological convictions. The willingness to work graciously alongside clergy from vastly different traditions is a prerequisite to effective ministry in this religiously diverse setting.

Some religious traditions view ecumenical ministry in ways comparable to the classic Augustinian notion of sex within marriage; i.e., it is not necessarily a sin, provided you don't enjoy it. The church's ecumenical theological heritage of Wesley's "catholic spirit" offers United Methodist chaplains freedom to minister amid a collage of religious traditions without compromising vital biblical convictions—and to enjoy it.

How Are Chaplains Prepared?

The church's theological education offers few courses on the theology and practice of ministry in institutional settings, whether military, corporation, hospital, or campus. Some seminaries are making moves to offer modest academic fare in that direction, though major unmet needs remain. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry offers endorsed clergy guidance on church policy and teaching in relevant areas. For example, the church explicitly forbids United Methodist chaplains from carrying weapons and even from qualifying for using a pistol or rifle in training settings. Through website and correspondence, ongoing education and contact with chaplains keep those in this extension ministry in touch with relevant ecclesial and theological issues and resources.

The military offers extensive training to its chaplains at various points in their ministry careers. The Basic Course, offered in various forms by the Army, Navy, and Air Force, generally runs for six to ten weeks and covers foundation principles and practices for ministry in an institutional military setting. Teaching theology is carefully avoided. Consistent with church-state separation, the Department of Defense has no position on the inspiration of Scripture or the person of Christ. Chaplain candidates are encouraged to discuss and explore how their particular theologies inform the faith and practice they bring with them into the military as clergy.

The ethos for ministry includes "religious ministry and accommodation, outreach and pastoral care." For a United Methodist chaplain, this entails lead-
ership of worship, sacramental acts, and religious studies consistent with the conscience of the chaplain and the teachings of the church. "Accommodation" includes ensuring that men and women of other Christian or non-Christian traditions also are provided access to worship, study, special dietary requirements, and other resources required to practice their faith. "Pastoral care" means offering counsel and institutional advocacy for the service member and family, regardless of their religion or lack of one. Over 34 percent of all those enlisted today indicate no religious preference, making them the single largest spiritual category to whom chaplains minister. These three perspectives provide a helpful frame of reference for understanding the First Amendment justification for chaplains as agents to assist in assuring the free exercise of religion guaranteed by the Constitution.2

The Basic Course includes field training and classroom instruction in relevant combat ministries, such as pastoral care on the battlefield, ministry to the wounded, care for the dead, preparing service members and their families for separations. The Law of War, and Post Traumatic Stress Training. It also includes an introduction to a variety of religious traditions, both to assist in meeting the needs of military personnel in combat areas who are not of the chaplain's faith and to assist in advising the commanding officer on issues of sensitivity to the religious traditions of other countries where the unit may be assigned. As mission agencies offer intensive preparation before sending recruits into a new culture, so the military offers focused training for clergy amid the profound social, cultural, and spiritual differences they will experience in ministry to those in uniform.

Advanced training for mid-grade and senior chaplains includes schooling that can last from two weeks to a year. Supervision in combat settings amid the fog of war, communication and logistical support for religious resources in the midst of upheaval, and the offering of moral and ethical advice to commanding officers are among the topics covered. Understanding how the various branches of the military work together in "joint" settings where chaplains from all branches may be in the same geographic setting is another topic for education. Chaplains learn how to rely on sister services to meet the common pastoral needs of God’s people. Both learning the nuances and problems of ministry in "Military Operations Other Than War" (MOOTW) and working with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are two examples of the military glossolalia chaplains learn and the institutional dynamics they must engage wisely to minister effectively.
Those new to the military chaplaincy soon discover that their assigned unit is engaged in constant training for real world exigencies. Army and Marine Corps chaplains train for responses to chemical or biological assault, for ministry in night combat situations, how to do land navigation if cut off from one's unit, and how to keep pace with the unit when covering long distances in rapid order. Navy chaplains go through General Quarters, shipboard fire fighting and damage-control drills, and mass-casualty scenarios. Air Force chaplains deal with scenarios involving attack on the airfield or the loss of substantial numbers of planes and crews at one time. None of this regular training is chaplain specific; it is training the entire unit routinely schedules to keep them at peak effectiveness. Chaplains, as complete players in the various scenarios, find themselves better prepared for future events even as they build present relationships with the young service members with whom they undergo the training.

Ministry in Combat

From what I have said thus far, it is clear that ministry in combat is not a static snapshot but a holistic, seamless approach that begins well before hostilities commence. It includes gatherings with families of those about to depart for the combat zone, with chaplains working in tandem with helping professionals in mental health, financial management, and other services. These "Pre-Deployment Seminars" prepare spouses and children left behind by making them aware of helping resources, ensuring they are linked to support networks for practical assistance and communication with the unit. Families are made aware of predictable emotional responses to the fact of separation. Active duty members go through the same type of seminar, with the family, if time permits. Chaplains, whether deployed or remaining at the home bases, are key players in this human preparation for the uncertainty of what awaits. The anxieties of military members ease as they know that their loved ones have networks of support in place. Chaplains in ministry at home bases and installations develop advanced response plans for pastoral care to families should the service member be wounded or killed.

As combat nears, chaplains with units ashore focus on high visibility and presence with the troops, visiting as many as possible before the start of hostilities spreads the unit in a dozen directions. The chaplain ensures that his or her own line of support is in place, including logistical back-up for sacramental needs and the identity of colleagues from whatever branch.
of service who might be nearby for fellowship and spiritual sharing.

Chaplains have enlisted personnel assigned to take care of the practical matters of transportation, supply, and other nitty-gritty details. These enlisted personnel, who are trained specifically to support chaplains and have their own career field in the military, are absolutely indispensable to the effectiveness of chaplains in combat settings. On a number of occasions in the recent Iraq war, these enlisted members of the Religious Ministry Team used their weapons in defense of chaplains in heavy combat situations. These enlisted personnel are not chaplains; they are officially combatants, and one of their roles is to defend the noncombatant chaplain, if required by events.

Chaplains on ships likewise keep high visibility through regular visitation to work spaces. The counseling load is heavy, often fueled by concerns over possible chemical or biological attack; concerns over the family at home, loneliness from months at sea, and the official eighty-one-hour work/training week at sea set by Navy policy. In addition to coordinating ministry for a variety of other faith groups, shipboard chaplains lead regular worship services. On larger ships, such as aircraft carriers, the crew may receive a dozen or more death or crisis messages from family on a daily basis. When the message arrives, through Red Cross or other official channels, the chaplain delivers it. If the sailor learns of a loved one's death via private e-mail, the chaplain works with the ship to provide pastoral care and, in cases of immediate family-member death or life-threatening health concerns, works to get the sailor flown home at the earliest opportunity.

A unique aspect of a Navy chaplain's ministry is the evening prayer at sea, offered over the ship's intercom and heard by all hands around 10 P.M. nightly when underway. The brief prayer often deals with some issue affecting the crew, some grounds for hope, or some other aspect of life on the ship, seeking God's wisdom and strength in tackling the problem. On the eve of combat and during combat operations, the 5,500 young sailors on a typical aircraft carrier can find a moral or spiritual definition of their day in the chaplain's words.

Air Force chaplains assigned to combat units find a heavy schedule of operations as typical fare and seek to pace their ministry to be present as each sortie departs and returns. Conversations over concern for safety or for loved ones at home and questions about the what-if of accidentally hitting a target that might kill civilians are part of the counseling load. The pressure on enlisted men and women who keep the planes serviced and
flying round the clock is intense. Exhaustion can breed concerns over doing all the maintenance correctly. The loss of an aircraft and crew is felt deeply by the entire squadron, with the chaplain often called upon to give a spiritual context and guidance to the meaning of the loss and permission to grieve that loss.

**A Ministry of Presence**

In the recent Iraq conflict and its continuing aftermath, a ministry of presence sets the stage for effective pastoral care. The fact that chaplains are *incarnate* with the unit from the beginning, not simply *embedded* like news reporters who arrived on the evening of battle and departed when the dust cleared, gives chaplains an empathy and credibility that build major bridges in subsequent ministry. A soldier or Marine feels greater freedom to express concerns of fear, or missing one's family, or wondering what would happen in battle with the knowledge that the chaplain is also missing family and equally unsure of the future.

*Chaplains lead and facilitate worship.* Services can be short, with attendees from diverse spiritual backgrounds. Such factors nudge chaplains to reflect on what matters most to include in a service to bring integrity and meaning to a spiritually eclectic group of young adults. Arranging for the worship needs of other faith groups, such as finding a priest to say mass or setting aside a private space with access to water for ablutions for Muslim troops in required prayers, push chaplains in creative directions.

*Chaplains are involved in ministry to those suffering from battle fatigue,* a profound emotional, physical, and spiritual depletion brought on by the shock of war, especially in situations where a large number of ill-trained enemy soldiers have been killed close at hand. Chaplains saw their role not as one of "smoothing over" the spiritual effects of such horrifying experiences but of being emotionally and spiritually present with the service member during the initial process of reacting as human beings to the inhumanity that is inherent in war.

*Chaplains are involved as moral counselors.* One weeping young service member sought out a chaplain. He and his squad had been ordered to check out an Iraqi bunker. As they approached, two Iraqi soldiers emerged. In one hand each held an AK-47 automatic assault rifle and in the other an Iraqi child as a human shield. When the Iraqi soldiers raised their weapons to fire on the Americans, they and the children were killed in the exchange.
The chaplain did not seek to rationalize the young American's moral pain over what he had seen and done. In the assessment of the chaplain, the service member's greatest pastoral need at the moment was to be held and to be given the emotional room he needed to express his anger, grief, and guilt. Total engagement with such issues needs to happen, but the timing must be driven by the questions and the emotional capacity of the service member rather than by the chaplain's desire to meet his or her own emotional and spiritual need to say the "right" thing.

Chaplains focus on ministry to the wounded and dying and honor the dead. A forward medical receiving area, where the wounded are first transported, is a primary location for chaplains in actual combat. A critically wounded Jewish Marine was brought to a forward medical aid station for evacuation to the rear. His Protestant battalion chaplain knew him and prayed the Shema with him. The young Marine thanked the chaplain but said his wounds were not that serious. He died on the medivac flight, and his family subsequently expressed gratitude for the care offered. In the heat of battle, soldiers and Marines often expect their chaplain to be the first face a wounded comrade sees upon evacuation from a combat zone after the doctor has begun treatment.

In the modern American military, where many recruits list their religious preference as "none," the initial understanding of a chaplain's role may be refracted through the lens of a generalized civil religion by those without the spiritual traditioning of a faith group background. As the chaplain comes to know the men and women in the unit, ministry of presence becomes more than merely walking around with a clueless smile. Relationships and reputation begin to build bridges that permit the chaplain to approach those in crisis without formal invitation. While this ministry is most obvious in pastoral care of the wounded, it extends to all military members.

To honor the dead in combat settings is more than a brief, perfunctory memorial service. The reverent handling of remains is a major issue of morale and "rightness" to those in combat. Those killed in modern combat can suffer from traumatic injuries that disfigure the remains beyond anything Hollywood has produced. Chaplains were involved in ensuring remains were collected, ministering to those who saw the death or who collected the body parts, and offering the vitally important closure of a memorial service for the fallen.

Ministry to the wounded in the major ground war was not limited to U.S.
forces. Many medical battalions treated more Iraqi soldier and civilian casualties than Americans. Chaplains sought to ease the fears of Iraqi soldiers that they would be tortured. When Iraqi soldier patients became violent or coarse in behavior toward U.S. medical personnel, the chaplains would focus on helping the medics deal with their anger over certain actions of those Iraqi wounded. Civilian casualties, especially children, affected medical staff in the initial stages of combat. Chaplains, while sharing the deep feelings of medical personnel over seeing wounded children, sought to create an atmosphere in which medical personnel could find time and occasion to deal with their own feelings while continuing to provide the exceptional level of care offered to all the wounded. At such times, training received in post-traumatic stress and certification in Critical Incidents Stress Debriefing emerge as vital tools in the pastoral kit.

Chaplains minister to the system and through the system. On arrival in Kuwait, one macho commanding officer decreed that his people would not call home, since such contact would be distracting and unworthy of real warriors. When a neighboring unit chaplain heard of this from distressed members of the unit, the chaplain made a tactful inquiry of the CO on the emotional wisdom of that refusal and was rebuffed. The chaplain then brought the issue to the attention of the next level of command, which promptly recognized the stupidity of the policy and had phones set up in the unit's area within three hours for calls home. That was the first word any family members had received from their loved ones since departing the States weeks earlier. The next day the ground war began. While some criticized the chaplain for speaking out, a grateful unit and their families found no fault in the chaplain's moral intervention in the system.

Chaplains offer moral reference points to the troops. This includes the traditional encouragement to focus energies prior to combat into directions other than fornication and alcohol. It also includes unit prayers on the eve of combat with reference to the humanity of enemy troops, couched in terms of prayer for a short war that would send both Iraqi and Coalition troops back to their loved ones in safety. Many leaders in major faith groups declared the war to be unjustified. For some, the war failed to meet the criteria for traditional just war theory. Others, operating from a functionally pacifistic stance, in which armed conflict might be justified in theory but never in practice, predictably opposed it. Yet others opposed it out of concern that the wider world
community, symbolized by the United Nations, had not supported the conflict or questioned what they saw as artificial urgency about its timing. Chaplains endorsed by faith groups that were asking such questions served in the conflict, ranging from Roman Catholic to United Methodist.

In a dramatic and positive shift from the polarizing atmosphere of the Vietnam era, both faith-group leaders and chaplains expressed strong support for the legitimacy of ministry to the men and women in uniform and their families and the equal legitimacy of raising biblical and moral concerns over the rightness of the war. Opinions on the wisdom of the war differed, and continue to differ, but the affirmation of the priority of ministry to those in service, embodied in the Council of Bishops' letter to the church on the eve of conflict, established a constructive tone.

Issues of theology and ministry remain for chaplains and the church. Most chaplains are convinced that their status as commissioned officers opens doors in dealing with institutional issues and advocacy that an ad hoc status could not match. A commanding officer can easily dismiss a religious "do-gooder" who protests his refusal to allow his unit to communicate with loved ones on the eve of combat. When the do-gooder is a full colonel chaplain with direct access to the commanding general, dynamics alter in the rank-conscious world of the military. That said, other chaplains remain concerned that rank can become an alluring perk that domesticates the prophetic voice and creates barriers in direct ministry to junior enlisted personnel, who are nervous in the presence of officers. A chaplain can become socialized by the system and insensitive to unjust or unfair actions by those in authority.

Incarnational ministry enables intimacy and trust with those in the crisis and the boredom of combat settings. Prior relationships and shared experiences birth ministry that an external presence, no matter how well intentioned, cannot match. Eli Takesian, a retired Presbyterian Navy chaplain with extensive service with Marines in Vietnam, recalled one example from the 1968 Tet offensive:

A grimmer account is that of a 20 year old Marine I knew well. He had just returned from rest and relaxation (R&R) in Hawaii where, days earlier, he had just married his hometown sweetheart. Now he was lying on the deck, dying of a sucking chest wound. His face close to mine, he spoke of his joy and fulfillment in marriage. Finally, in a barely audible voice, he whispered. "Please..."
Incarnation can run off the rails into compromise. The eagerness to identify with the troops can mutate the chaplain into a pseudo-warrior. He or she can crank out public prayers that more fittingly rise to Odin in Valhalla than to the Prince of Peace, with moral counsel that predictably confuses duty to God with duty to country. Symptoms of this spiritual malaise include the inability to articulate any meaningful nonviolent Christian teaching and the tendency to stereotype those who disagree with national policy.

Theological issues remain. When does a chaplain’s role as moral and ethical advisor to the command cross the line into offering tactical or strategic advice, thus making that chaplain a functional combatant or a “Force Multiplier”? In battle, are there occasions in which a chaplain’s presence, by its very nature, endorses war and its inevitable horrors? Where does the chaplain turn for his or her own spiritual guidance and care amid the prolonged demands of ministry in a combat or crisis setting? How does a chaplain discern the difference between the prophetic word and the moralizing whine? If incarnational ministry is the paradigm for military pastoral presence, how can a chaplain minister in the system without becoming an improper tool of the system?

During the Iraq ground war, a chaplain (not a United Methodist) in an intense combat situation used an M-16 rifle to kill a number of attacking Iraqi soldiers, a possible violation of Army policy and the Geneva Convention regarding chaplains as noncombatants. The event was witnessed by several reporters embedded with the unit. Leaping to judgments that easily excuse or automatically condemn these alleged actions serves no purpose. The forthrightness shown by the military system in general and by the military chaplaincy in particular in dealing fairly and decisively with this event will be a powerful witness that reinforces or calls into question the theological integrity of institutional military chaplaincy. The manner in which the faith-group endorsing agents respond to such difficult issues will serve either to affirm or condemn the fundamental soundness of the theological accountability process.

Each of these questions, and dozens more, is the dynamic substance of the ongoing interaction of the various faith-group endorsers with their
THE MILITARY CHAPLAIN IN TIME OF WAR: CONTOURS AND CONTENT OF MINISTRY

Robert Phillips is the senior United Methodist chaplain in the U.S. Navy, currently assigned in Norfolk, Virginia.

Endnotes

1. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of the Navy.
2. NWP 1-04, Religious Ministry in the U.S. Navy, Department of the Navy (August 2003), 1-2.
"I Recognize Religion . . .": Terrorism and Pastoral Theology

G. CLARKE CHAPMAN, JR.

On September 11, 2001, one of the witnesses beholding the stricken towers was a priest later interviewed on the superb PBS documentary "Frontline: Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero." With simple eloquence, Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete remembered:

From the first moment I looked into that horror on September 11, into that fireball, that explosion of horror, I knew it, I knew it before anything was said about those who did it or why. I recognized an old companion; I recognize religion. . . . The same passion that motivates religious people to do great things is the same one that that day brought all that destruction. When they said that the people who did it did it in the name of God, I was not in the slightest bit surprised. It only confirmed what I knew I recognized.1

Accustomed as we Americans are to supposing religion to be a sentimental analgesic for minor discomforts, we were stunned to find it behind this horrific act of terrorism. How could religion be involved with mass violence? Whatever happened to sweetness and light? Unimaginable!

When Religion Turns Violent

Yet we must learn here a new recognition. A number of fine books have appeared recently to guide us through this uncharted territory. The authors include Karen Armstrong, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Charles Kimball.2 They clarify the shock felt by people who live on the margins and feel overwhelmed by the seismic shifts of modernization and globalization. For traditional societies, the rapid onslaught of modernity—its clothes, movies, and job displacement—is enough to jeopardize one's spirituality and one's sense of identity. The timeless axis mundi that connects heaven and earth has been shaken. But it is intolerable to lose all that has bound one's society for generations to the transcendent. The world appears to degenerate into a battleground against secularism, an apoca-
lyptic clash of good against evil. Violent retaliation then becomes a natural
response for the victims of a war they feel has been imposed upon them.

Having analyzed the problem at such depth, however, these authors
go on to offer solutions that are surprisingly prosaic. Armstrong and
Juergensmeyer ask that civil authorities act with patience and tolerance,
bringing their Enlightenment values into cooperation with the humane
nucleus of every religion. Kimball wishes each religion to renounce its
extremist fringes and reaffirm its inclusivist mainstream. These are wise
and gentle prescriptions, certainly deserving to be embraced. But do they
go far enough? If behind the dust and roar of collapsing buildings we can
"recognize religion," then must we not probe the very depths of what reli­
gion also can offer as a solution?

If religious terrorism originates in existential anxiety—the dread that
new cultural shifts are separating a people's psyche from the Absolute—
then this is the level that must be addressed. While until recently most
Americans have been shielded from the ill effects so familiar to the Third
World, that September morning changed everything. That day thrust us
rudely into the shock of vulnerability—a defenselessness already haunting
the majority of the human race. Now also we privileged few, the citizens of
Empire, flail about to regain our bearings—even though that may only
make things worse. So, given the excesses of the Bush Administration,
voices of moderation in public policy are important. But can moderation
touch a people's soul, the nerve center that cries out with a sense of loss?
In the last analysis, it is theology to which we must turn—for practical as
well as theoretical reasons.

**How May Theology Hinder or Help?**

Unfortunately, both in developing and in industrialized countries, the theo­
logical salve popular so far has been militant fundamentalism. While no
doubt comforting to partisans, in the long run it only makes things worse
for everyone by reifying present distress into a cosmic warfare. Absolute
good and evil descend to the human realm, to be locked in mortal combat.
Latent fears of annihilation are elicited, shaped, and mobilized into a
struggle that knows no restraints and shows no mercy. Chaos is averted
when scapegoats are unmasked. For such theology, then, any compromise
becomes immoral, any coexistence impossible. And now technology has
heightened the danger by cheapening the cost of weapons of mass destruc-
tion; ever-smaller groups now can cause ever-greater havoc.

The attraction of fundamentalist dualism is not limited to religious terrorists. Indeed national policies of counter-terrorism seize upon the same polarities, softened only slightly by political considerations. Bruce Lincoln, for instance, in his recent book *Holy Terrors* finds parallels in two addresses, both given on October 7, 2001. The one was by Osama bin Laden, the other by President George W. Bush. They both seek to rally the faithful by demonizing the enemy, whether as “infidel” or as “terrorist”—an enemy accused of despicable acts that put innocent children in danger.

But can we come to recognize religion in ways that offer another approach, that avoid spasms of rage claiming to be divine vengeance? In an age beset by terror and counter-terror, such an alternative must plumb the depths of the human psyche, touching the pain and healing the inner panic aroused by modernity’s incursions. Conventional assurances and formalities are insufficient when facing the fury of raw existential dread. Somehow the human linkage to the transcendent must be reestablished and nurtured in every culture, yet without forfeiting the flexibility to cope with inexorable forces of the new globalization.

**Two Resources for a New Pastoral Theology**

Of course, each of the world’s religions must approach this task in terms of its own tradition. I can speak only for my own Christian, Protestant heritage. I believe we Protestants must find a new pastoral theology. This pastoral theology must combine the insights of depth psychology into the darker sides of the psyche with the heritage and hope of Reformation thought.

We need psychological resources to gain the necessary understanding of how mass violence attracts its own religious fascinations and compulsions. We cannot ignore this macabre alliance for reasons of doctrinal inconvenience or moral repugnance. Granted, neither Freud nor Jung has been welcomed widely as an ally by the church; but they pioneered in plumbing the depths of humanity’s tendencies toward bestial yearnings and brutality, our eagerness for self-deception disguised as grandeur. The tradition of depth psychology they founded has explored subterranean realms not only of our degradation but also of our untapped potential for maturation. Today we could well benefit by learning from analysts who have already explored some psychodynamics behind the sacred aura attributed to bloodshed; for collective aggression has always had a mystique verging on the religious.
On a popular level, for instance, J. Glenn Gray’s *The Warriors* describes various appeals of battle, including the "fearful beauty" of destruction. A more recent example is Chris Hedges, who reflects on his experience of reporting in many combat zones. His thesis is embodied in the title of his book, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*. By reducing everything to a black/white scenario, battle makes the world intelligible, rationalizes our blunders, compels our final loyalties, and justifies our orgies of mayhem. In short, "war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble."5

But there is more. The advent of weapons of mass destruction adds a new, more diabolical dimension to humanity’s fondness for sanctifying savagery. Robert Jay Lifton coined a name for it: "nuclearism: the passionate embrace of nuclear weapons as a solution to death anxiety and a way of restoring a lost sense of immortality."6 In a secularized world, the Bomb came to represent mysterious finality, invisible power, a terrible nemesis allied with an ultimate force of the universe. And it is widely observed how, in general, acts of orgiastic annihilation and visions of Armageddon still mesmerize us in public movie theaters and private nightmares.

Our society is only dimly aware of how much a cruel, tacit religiousness has attached itself to humanity’s bloodlust. We too easily award to violence a holy semblance that mimics transcendence. That is what a new pastoral theology must point out. It must develop ways of coping with this addiction, a quandary too often trivialized as merely a matter of mass-media programming or defective parenting. For such a task, depth psychology can be an ally.

Second, for Christians, it is the heritage of Reformation faith that should enrich our struggle to find new access to the transcendent. When shorn of its tendencies toward social conservatism, I believe this heritage is robust enough to be "recognized" as religion, one that is equal to the challenge of terrorism today. What is needed is a realistic view of human sin welded to a confidence in transforming grace, a dialectic model for living within competing loyalties, and a death-defying courage emboldened by hope in the Resurrection. Such a pastoral theology must be worldly enough to cooperate with the ethical dialogues urged by Armstrong and Juengensmeyer, for instance, but also profound enough to engage the very roots of terrorism and counter-terrorism. And as a model to invite us in these new directions, I propose the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
Bonhoeffer as a Pastoral Theologian

Like us, Bonhoeffer faced a situation of terrorism—the state terrorism of the Third Reich—and he did so with a combination of pragmatism and orthodox faith. He was immersed in the high culture of pre-War Berlin as well as its social problems, the immediate needs of his day. It was his worldly Christianity that bestowed the flexibility to shift with changing circumstances and eventually to ally with secular ringleaders of the movement to overthrow Hitler. But for all this, an orthodox Lutheran faith shaped his sense of direction and resilience, as shown especially in his sermons and letters. Despite horrors at every hand, his words, even to the end, remained radiant with assurances of the meaning in life. He insisted, after all, that the final reality is the God who united with humanity in Christ; there is to be found the ultimate that gives purpose and solace to our daily penultimate struggles.

Throughout the many roles Bonhoeffer played in his life, he remained preeminently a pastoral figure. Our own day needs this. For our generation seeking a new recognition of religion in times of terror, the enduring questions remain those of theodicy, providence, and discipleship. On each of these three points Bonhoeffer can speak to our pain.

How can such evil exist in a world created by a just God? Bonhoeffer sympathized with anyone who is victimized, but nonetheless he turned aside our penchant for blame games. He insisted, "The Bible does not seek to impart information about the origin of evil, but to witness to its character as guilt and as the unending burden that humankind bears." The real issue is not How come evil? but How overcome evil? The Cross leads us instead to confess our own complicity in guilt and to seek healing in God's boundless reconciliation.

Next, how can we trust a God who allows our highest designs to collapse into rubble, who permits our thirst for meaning in life to be frustrated? Again, Bonhoeffer is cautious in speaking of concepts of providence. It cannot be derived from simple theism or even from a doctrine of God as Creator. Rather, it flows from a christocentric vision of reality, a patience before the cruciform dialectics of history in which God mysteriously works. No divine plan at all can be deduced from current events; it is only in one's personal, existential struggle that one can catch a glimpse of providence. In prison, shortly before his untimely death, he could write, "I
am so sure of God’s guiding hand that I hope I shall always be kept in that certainty. You must never doubt that I’m traveling with gratitude and cheerfulness along the road where I’m being led.

Earlier he wrote, “Of course, not everything that happens is simply ‘God’s will’; yet in the last resort nothing happens ‘without God’s will’ (Matt. 10:29), i.e., through every event, however untoward, there is access to God.” For the believer, any happening in life comes with a potential, the possibility of opening to us justifying grace.

Finally, how can we become believers while living in a seemingly God-forsaken world? Bonhoeffer too lived in a time of widespread fear and loss of meaning. But his answer was a call to discipleship, following the crucified and risen Jesus. In a 1935 sermon he summarized the gospel accordingly:

"Fear God"—instead of the many things which you fear. Do not fear the coming day, do not fear other people, do not fear power and might, even if they are able to deprive you of property and life. . . . You are free from all this fear, . . . [E]verything else is a game—only God is in earnest, entirely in earnest. Fear God’s earnestness—and give God the glory.

This freedom also liberates us from our anger and the lust for revenge, for by acting on Good Friday God has already unleashed all the rightful anger necessary. For us mortals, our passion for punishments and vengeance must halt before the Cross, which is "nobody’s private property, but belongs to all; it is intended for all mankind. God loves our enemies—the cross tells us that." Therefore, all that remains for us sinners is to forgive those who do us wrong and to devote ourselves to "prayer and action for justice on behalf of people." Genuine freedom—in contrast to today’s propagandistic misuse of the term—begins here, a true freedom that relaxes any obsession with security, a freedom to be shared among those who participate in God's own self-giving. Discipleship is what brings meaning to life. That is the only security.

Our Choice in "Recognizing Religion"

Of course, it will be no easy task to develop a pastoral theology that is rooted in depth psychology and informed by Bonhoeffer. But unavoidably we are faced with a religious choice. When Fr. Albacete saw "that horror on
September 11,” he said, “I knew it . . . I recognize religion.” He went on to explain,

I recognize that this thirst for the never-ending, the permanent, the Oneness of all things . . . are characteristics of religion. And I knew that that force can take you to do great things. But I knew there is no greater or [more] destructive force on the surface of this earth than the religious passion.13

That is the choice imposed by recognizing religion. Will such primal passions, now wedded to new technologies of mass death, destroy us? Or can they be healed and redirected through a revitalized pastoral theology, one that, at least for Christians, is based on Cross and Resurrection? Let us hear again what Bonhoeffer chose:

We are not Christ, but if we want to be Christians, we must have some share in Christ’s largeheartedness by acting with responsibility and in freedom when the hour of danger comes, and by showing a real compassion that springs, not from fear, but from the liberating and redeeming love of Christ for all who suffer.14

G. Clarke Chapman, Jr., is Professor of Religion at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Endnotes


11. Ibid., 285.


13. See endnote 1.

Beyond Burnout: New Creation and the Economics of Grace in Global Capitalism

JOERG RIEGER

Ideas of new creation have often been tied up with appeals to action. If there is to be a new creation, somebody needs to do something. I have heard both Protestant liberals and Roman Catholic conservatives (and many others in between) say that "God has no other hands than our hands, and no other feet than our feet."

In this perspective, the most important question is this: What can we do? Liberation theologies, for instance, especially within the context of the so-called "First World," have often been misunderstood in this light. Rooted firmly in Enlightenment ideas of autonomy and models of entrepreneurship promoted in the various stages of the development of capitalism, First World interpreters of liberation theologies could see only an ethical imperative and a call to engage in social activism. A similar focus on the question, What can we do? is also found in the other, now much more prominent, response to poverty and suffering through acts of charity and social service. A large number of churches, especially in the United States, have caught on to these practices.

However, there are, however, two major problems with these approaches. The first and more familiar one is burnout, or what has also become known as "compassion fatigue." How do we keep up long term whatever level of action we choose? This problem has had its own well-known incarnations in earlier decades. But my prediction is that this will soon become a major issue again, particularly in the context of the excitement about various faith-based programs now promoted by the U.S. government.

The second problem is perhaps more serious but also less obvious in the current climate. How do we prevent our actions and activisms from
becoming controlling? For the most part, this problem is not even on the
map yet, since well-meaning First World Christians have little sense that in
taking things into their own hands they may end up controlling and manip­
ulating those whom they want to help. Thus, the history of nineteenth-
century Christian missions repeats itself in a slightly different way: we end
up once again shaping other people in our own image—this time, of course,
not so much by preaching to them but by trying to help them.

Developing ways to resist these problems is not easy, since they are
now so engrained in the culture of our “new world order” to which both
liberals and conservatives subscribe in their own ways. In this essay, I
suggest forms of theological resistance, rooted in the notion of grace. The
theological notion of grace, as I will argue, provides us with alternatives to
both burnout and a mentality of control, and pushes us toward a whole
new way of life that amounts to nothing less than a “new creation.”

A Free-Market Economics of Grace

It is tempting to contrast the free-market economy with what might be
called the “economy of grace.” At first sight, the free-market economy runs
on the basis of action and works. Only those who work hard will succeed—
or so the story goes. Conversely, an economy of grace runs on the basis of
God’s free gift. Here, only the recipients of God’s gifts will succeed. But at
a time in which late, neoliberal, and globalizing capitalism is expanding its
reach into every nook and cranny of our lives, both models are easily
pulled in by the powers that be.

The first position, the works righteousness of the free-market economy,
can quickly be exposed as an illusion. There are now lots of people, even in
First World countries, who work extraordinarily hard, frequently several
jobs at once and do not succeed.3 And as to those who succeed: could
anyone seriously claim that, since the average CEO in the U.S. now makes
531 times the salary of the average worker, some people can indeed work
hundreds of times harder than others?4 That sort of works righteousness
comes with its own Pelagian doctrine of grace: God gives us the ability to
perform well (we tend to tell our children that they can be anything they
want to be), but will and action are ours; or, as the motto of the Nike
Corporation demands, “Just do it.” But the tremendous differences
between the rich and the poor, even between different groups within the
context of the wealthier countries—let alone between the wealthier coun-
tries and the poorer countries around the globe—can hardly be explained that way. How much more will and action can a CEO of a global corporation muster compared to a worker in a factory in a country of the Two-Thirds World, considering that their salaries may differ by a factor of ten thousand times or more?

But what about the second position, the economy of grace? What is wrong with it? First of all, we need to remind ourselves that the global market economy is no longer based on works righteousness alone. Its real success lies elsewhere. Works righteousness—the belief that we are compensated according to the value or intensity of our labor—is now a more or less convenient cover-up that lets us maintain appearances and that keeps up morale at the top and those on the underside in place. A good part of income is now produced no longer by work but by the stock market. For instance, the astounding wealth of CEOs is produced more and more by stock options and other bonus and benefit packages that resemble the model of “free grace.” The whole idea of the 401K retirement programs in the U.S. designed mainly for the middle class, is based on a similar concept: the market will insure the necessary surplus so that our relatively modest contributions to these funds let us live happily ever after. In other words, those who know how to hook up with the benefits of the market succeed. Similar attitudes plague our Christian concept of free grace. For instance, the Wesleyan model of prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace is often seen in the following fashion: those who know how to hook up with its benefits will succeed. In this process, grace becomes a commodity, something that can be owned as private property and can be used by its owners for their own purposes. There are close connections between the globalizing economy and this economy of grace, and it is no mere coincidence that in both cases those who benefit most from such “free grace” and all the other blessings life has to offer are the members of the middle and upper classes.

These two positions—works righteousness and an economy of grace that promotes a sense that the best things in life are free to those who know how to position themselves—resonate with the two problems mentioned in the introduction: burnout and control. For example, burnout can be seen in those who drop out of the pressures of successful careers (the semblance of works righteousness in the professional world) to pursue a simpler life. Similarly, burnout can be seen in Christians who drop out of
the pressures of activism on the assumption that less action will still give them the desired results. And a controlling attitude is evident not only in those who have to work hard for their success but also in those who, having benefited from the abundant free grace of the market, want to pass on some of their blessings—now, of course, with strings attached. Here, the wealthy philanthropist and the well-meaning Christian do not differ much: both assume that they possess something that other people need and that they know what is best for them.

An Alternative Economics of Grace

However, the theme of the "new creation" reaches deeper and suggests an entirely new perspective that leads us beyond controlling activism and its corollary, burnout. This new creation is driven neither by "orthopraxis" (activism or service) nor by "orthodoxy" (knowing how to hook up with grace in ways that allow us to exploit it as a commodity). Rather, it is driven by a relation to an alternative energy source that creates an alternative economics of grace.7

A first step beyond the commodification of grace is to understand that grace is related to a giver who cannot be commodified.8 For instance, instead of speaking about "justification" or "sanctification," we might use the terms justifying grace and sanctifying grace to point to the fact that the focus is not on us and on our performance but beyond ourselves. Ultimately, both justification and sanctification are out of our hands; they are in God's hands. The grace conveyed to us in these processes, we need to remind ourselves, is always tied to our relationship with God. For that reason, grace cannot be a commodity, something that we can appropriate and own like private property. There can be no "spiritual capitalism," even though John Wesley can easily be misunderstood in this way. Such misunderstandings are among the biggest problems of the church today, not only in regard to the promoters of the "gospel of success" but also in regard to average church people, who (mostly without being aware of it) bring their business logic to church. Yet Wesley's own encouragement to go "from grace to grace" displays a different logic. His advice, to "stir up that spark of grace that is within you, and he will give you more grace."9 is based on an understanding of grace not as commodity or private property but as a growing relationship between the Christian and God.10

In our current situation, where our thinking as a whole increasingly is
shaped by the logic of neoliberal capitalism, everything depends on whether we understand that the notion of grace cannot be commodified. Grace, understood in such a relational way, resists the free-market understanding of the abundant return of an investment or the surplus gained by following orthodox economic doctrine. Grace can no longer be seen simply as a matter of receiving free gifts. In our current economy, such gifts are of course given all the time in the form of—often unmerited—bonuses (the severance pay for CEOs commonly covers two or three years of salary, even in cases where CEOs are fired) and overabundant returns on certain investments. The so-called "bubble economy" of the 1990s has raised our expectations, and we are not ready to go back to pre-1990s conditions, even though economic options seem to be a little more restricted in the current bear markets. Yet an alternative notion of grace cannot be based on the logic of the market; it needs to be based on a relationship with God.

The difference between thinking about grace in terms of a relationship with God and thinking about grace as a commodity is that in this relationship grace cannot be controlled, because God cannot be controlled. God's gift of grace is "free" not in the sense that it is another resource we can exploit if we know the tricks how to get it but in the sense that there is simply no way for us to control it (not even a religious one, as Martin Luther and later John Wesley realized in their own ways). Grace happens in our relationship with God, a relationship that is initiated by God and that invites our response. There is no "substance" or "essence" of grace that exists apart from that relationship. In fact, it might be argued that grace is precisely that relationship between God and us.

Wesley calls into question an understanding of God's gifts as private property. In fact, he even rejects understanding God's gifts as a loan, because this does not put enough emphasis on our ongoing relationship with God. In our context, we could say that even the image of a loan allows the further commodification of God's gifts. In Wesley's thinking, receiving God's gifts has to do with a relationship. We are God's stewards, he says, because "we are now indebted to [God] for all we have; but although a debtor is obliged to return what he has received, yet until the time of payment comes he is at liberty to use it as he pleases. It is not so with a steward: he is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as he pleases, but as his master pleases."

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Wesley’s thinking is thoroughly relational, rooted in God’s own ways of relating to us. The goal illustrates the way: in his sermon on the New Creation, where Wesley (quite untypically) looks far into the future, he concludes that at the end “there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him.”

Such relational thinking creates room for an alternative economics of grace and leads us beyond one of the fundamental problems of burnout: the illusion that we have to take things into our own hands, that we need to be in charge of everything. It also leads us beyond the idea that our knowledge of the right tricks and sources can help us in exploiting “free grace.”

**Grace and Resistance**

However, there is one more roadblock. Even when we stop thinking about grace in terms of a commodifiable substance and instead think about it in terms of our relationship with God, how do we make sure that this relationship stays open? How do we resist the temptation to control and manipulate even this ultimate relationship?

One of the biggest problems at present, made worse by the all-pervasive climate of late capitalism, is that relationships are of value only when they produce results. No doubt, our relationship with God can be pressed into this category as well. “What is in it for me?” is a question commonly asked, even in our most intimate relationships. Relationships generally are considered successful if we manage to shape in our own image those with whom we are in relation. For instance, relationships to employees are successful only if we can shape them in such a way that they produce what we need and want—a surplus for us. That is now frequently also the way we look at the rest of the world, including our own family members. How do we escape this trap in our personal relationships? And how do we make sure that we escape this trap where our relation to God is concerned?

I have argued elsewhere that the way we relate to other people is indicative of the way we relate to God. If we are unable to respect other people—and this is one of the basic problems of our age, even for those who mean well and want to help—we may also be unable to respect God, despite our best intentions and no matter how respectful our theological language, our liturgies, and our worship services appear. At a time when
relationships to others are built not on mutual respect but on economic and other gain, our relationship with God is in trouble, too.

In short, we need to give some serious thought to how our relationships with other people shape up. In this context, both social service and social activism models may lead us to a first step beyond crude market logic. After all, people who try to help others realize in some ways at least that there are other people out there. But in both models relationships often get distorted. In trying to help others, are we not tempted to shape them in our own image? Social service models aim at filling in the gaps that separate others from us, implying that our own position is the standard. The basic idea is to help people to become a little more like us. Social action models often operate as if they knew what others really need—a place at our table, for instance. If we manage to integrate them into the system and in this way help them to become like us, our job is done.

The problem stems from our attempts to build relationships from positions of power and control, from the top down. For example, well-meaning parents tell their children that “others are just like us.” In this way, they deal with others on their own terms, never able to realize, let alone respect, the difference of others.

We need to learn how to build relationships differently. A first step in resisting the top-down perspective is to realize that others are always already part of who we are. Our identity is shaped in relation to others, whether through the guidance of our parents, teachers, and friends; through repressions in which we identify ourselves negatively as being unlike poor people, ethnic minorities, or people of other sexual orientations; and sometimes even on the backs of other people, who, for instance, work for low wages so that we can live more comfortably. Here, we need to understand first of all not how “they are like us” but how “we are like them”—what it is that connects us. How did they contribute to shaping our identity?

Real relationships will need to take into account this mutuality between us and others. This is not always pleasant, and sometimes it will require us to face some hard truths about ourselves. But this leads us to a more fruitful theological question as well: How are we like God (imago dei, not as what we are now but as what we are to become in relation to God)? Or, how does God define who we are?

In reshaping our relationships with others, we might have a chance of reshaping our relationship with God as well. On these grounds we can
then develop new forms of resistance to the logic of the free-market economy that goes directly against those one-sided relationships that constitute the pillars of effective business relations.

**Means of Grace**

Wesley's thinking about the means of grace provides additional support for my argument of a parallel between our relationships with God and with other people. In the 1780s, Wesley expanded and in the process reshaped, the traditional idea of the means of grace. Means of grace, as is well known, are channels through which we receive God's grace into our lives. Expanding a more traditional list of means of grace, which included prayer, Bible, and Holy Communion, Wesley adds works of mercy. What is more, in cases of conflict, works of mercy are to be preferred. This argument, far from being merely another interesting theological idea, reflects the way in which Wesley lived his life and pursued his ministry.

Once works of mercy are seen as means of grace, a new way opens up beyond the impasse of social activism and social service. The main focus is now no longer on what we can do. It all starts with grace. Furthermore, the notion of grace itself broadens here. Grace becomes even more thoroughly relational. Grace happens in our relation to God and—and this is the new challenge—in our relation to other people as well. The emphasis is no longer first of all on what we can do for others and how we can reshape them in such a way that they fit our expectations. The emphasis is now on a mutual relationship where, in our encounters with others who cannot be controlled (is that not the ultimate challenge that people who are different pose to us: that they have their own ways of resisting our control?), God's grace freely flows into our lives in ways that we cannot control.

This type of relationship ceases to work where it is pulled into the expectations of the market. Yet grace based on this alternative form of relationship is no longer a matter of the market, of private property or personal gain, where one party gains at the expense of the other. This form of grace can no longer be used as a commodity. Here, something new happens: new energy is set free that leaves no room for burnout or for the morbid fantasies of control. Was it this that sustained Wesley through all the long years of his ministry?

This form of grace is no longer energy as a free-for-all. Grace now has a specific direction. It is tied to the lives of those who are different, those
whom we usually do not notice because they inhabit a lower class or are born into another race or gender, and it opens our eyes for God's own ways of bringing about a new creation in the midst of pain and suffering. Without these "works of mercy"—ways of receiving God's grace through relations with others, relations that can no longer be understood primarily as social service or activism—we will not know who we are or where to go. No wonder Wesley was concerned that, due to the neglect of works of mercy, some people had fallen from grace, despite all their works of piety.\footnote{17}

This leads us far beyond the recent dichotomy of "compassionate conservatism" and structural welfare programs. In both cases, it is assumed that the main thing that needs to be done is to integrate people back into the system. In both cases, grace is also tied to the system: grace is whatever helps us to support the status quo and to raise people to the next level within the system (like receiving welfare or winning the lottery). In this context, grace has no claim on those who "have it all," including the favor of God. Such grace has no direction other than to go with the flow. Such grace is manifest in what is often considered to be the true reward and gratification of social service and activism for middle-class people: to feel better about oneself at the end of the day and thus to be enabled to keep things the way they are.

Seeing works of mercy as means of grace changes everything. Grace that emerges in the relationship with God and with other people leads to a new perspective. More pointedly, in the context of late capitalism, new energy and a new direction emerge precisely where we push beyond commodified notions of grace and controlling relationships with others. This new situation develops where we allow our relations to other people to be reshaped in such a way that they also reshape our relation to God.\footnote{18} This brings me to the topic of new creation.

\textbf{New Creation}

If grace is what happens in our relationships with God and with other people, then there is not much sense in rehearsing the old question of whether we are talking about an "other-worldly" or a "this-worldly" process. A new perspective emerges, which is also reflected in Wesley's understanding of the doctrine of salvation. In his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation," based on Eph. 2:8, "You have been saved,"\footnote{19} Wesley tells us that salvation here is not to be understood as going to heaven or as eternal...
happiness. Salvation is what takes place here and now: “you are saved” or “you have been saved.” There simply is no need to play off the other-worldly and the this-worldly against each other. Our concern for how we relate to God and others here and now, and for what God is doing in these relationships, does not diminish our expectations for the future but focuses them—in such a way that they shape up as a critique of the powers that be. The focus on other-worldly issues too often leaves a vacuum that the interests of the free-market economy are more than happy to fill.

The goal of it all is nothing less than a new creation. If this creation is real in Jesus Christ and in those who are in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), then the point is not whether this new creation is “transcendent” or “immanent” or “futuristic” or “presentic,” but where it is happening now, what it looks like, and how it transforms all of reality.

Where does this all lead? Not even the sky is the limit. Directed and empowered by God’s gracious actions in our lives and in the world, Christians have the unique opportunity to resist the powers-that-be and to build something new. This is a core insight that connects the various approaches of liberation theology. The categories of social activism and ethics, often brought to bear on liberation theology issues by well-meaning observers and outside interpreters, can only be misleading in this context.

This new creation, brought about where God’s grace is at work, reaches all the way into the one thing that is probably most unthinkable for us at the moment: the transformation of the economy. We have been so trained to think that “capitalism is here to stay” that we have given up imagining alternatives. But the experience of the alternative economy of God’s grace will not let us rest easy, even with a supposedly triumphant global capitalism.

God’s gracious actions that reshaped the powers-that-be in relationship with the marginal people of Israel (Israel had always been a small and insignificant set of tribes compared to the powerful nations of its time), the marginal Jesus Christ (operating at the margins of the ancient world and of his own people), and even the marginal Wesley (operating at the margins of the Church of England and of society) put a damper on our current attempts to take things into our own hands. God’s alternative economy of grace leads us in new directions and into a new creation that may look quite different from the old.

One all-too-common misunderstanding is that all this relates mainly to
the notion of sanctifying grace as the place where people put grace into action and begin taking things into their own hands. But this leads us back into close proximity with the old issues of works righteousness, burnout, and control of others. A new vision emerges where we rethink this position, beginning with prevenient grace and justifying grace. In prevenient grace, according to Wesley’s understanding, we grasp for the first time who we really are before God. Even though this may be a fairly dim view of things, understanding who we really are before God includes some glimpse into understanding of who we really are in relation to our neighbors as well. Justifying grace could be viewed in a similar light: if forgiveness of our sins is to make sense, then it needs to include our relations both to God and to our neighbors. In this way, prevenient and justifying grace open the way for a broader vision of sanctifying grace as well. Unless we live our lives in mutual and noncontrolling relationships with God and with neighbor, the new creation is simply another pious illusion, and we are right back where we started.

Joerg Rieger is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas.

Endnotes
2. “Neoliberalism named a strategy that sought to place capitalism clearly back on the track of its still incomplete development by accelerating the drive to commodify, and therefore open every aspect of life to profits and the social discipline imposed by profits. This was not just a matter of the extension of markets spatially (globalization), but of deepening the domestic penetration of markets into any social, personal, or cultural space.” Sam Gindin, “Anti-Capitalism and the Terrain of Social Justice,” Monthly Review 53/9 (February 2002): 6.
3. In the United States the practice of working several jobs is quite common in lower income communities. In these communities it is taken for granted that both husband and wife are employed.
4. Editorial, Dallas Morning News (5 September 2001). Executive salaries have risen by 18 percent during the last year of economic slowdown. The average
executive now makes 531 times the salary of the average worker, up from 419:1 in 1999 and 70:1 in the late 1980s.


6. The problem of scarcity, which M. Douglas Meeks (*God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989], 12, 17ff.) and D. Stephen Long (*Divine Economy: Theology and the Market* [London: Routledge, 2000], 4, 242-44) see at the root of the logic of the market economy is not necessarily the problem here. In fact, this phenomenon shows that a logic of abundance and gift, which both Meeks and Long see as a remedy for the market economy, is now also a pervasive element in certain sectors of the economy.

7. In his own way, Wesley was aware of this double bind. Preaching on the Sermon on the Mount, he makes it clear that orthodoxy is not sufficient: “Whatever creeds we may rehearse; whatever professions of faith we make,” we may still miss the mark. The same is true for those who favor orthopraxis. See Sermon 33, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount: Discourse the Thirteenth,” in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 1:688-89 (hereafter *Works*).

8. This is close to Wesley’s own solution: “Let nothing satisfy thee but the power of godliness, but a religion that is spirit and life; the dwelling in God and God in thee.” Sermon 33, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” in *Works*, 1: 697.


10. Thomas Langford (*Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1983], 24, 48) notes that for Wesley grace is personal, tied to God’s presence in Jesus Christ. “In a basic sense, grace is Jesus Christ.”

11. Theodore Runyon (*The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1998], 13) makes a similar point about Wesley’s understanding of the image of God. Wesley sees this image relationally, “not so much as something humans possess as the way they relate to God and live out that relation in the world.”

12. In this sense, Christianity does not depend on a “metaphysics of presence.” This key term of postmodern thought was coined by Jacques Derrida in his critique of philosophical systems that guarantee firm foundations for philosophical reflection. See Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play,” in *Critical Theory since 1965*, ed. by Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: University
20. When Wesley talked about the Methodist movement, this is what he was most interested in. See, for instance, his account of the Methodist movement in Sermon 107, "On God's Vineyard," in Works, 3:503-17.
21. This is quite literally spelled out in Wesley's sermon "The New Creation."
22. See also the essays in Radical Methodism: Rejuvenating a Tradition for the New Millennium, ed. by Joerg Rieger and John Vincent (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2003).
Does connectionalism have a future in The United Methodist Church?

THOMAS E. FRANK

United Methodism shows little disposition for being church. It shows much more lively disposition for being an evangelical movement.

Efforts have continued through the past century to make Methodism a church. The union discussions that brought into being The United Methodist Church (1968) produced some fine ecclesiological statements about the nature and purpose of the church and its calling to unity of witness and service. The new denomination sponsored useful studies of ordained ministry and of the episcopacy, and joined with other Protestant churches in devising new lectionaries, hymnals, and services of baptism and of Word and Table.

Yet The United Methodist Church also steadfastly resisted becoming a church in the traditional ecclesiological sense of liturgy, sacrament, ordination, and episcopacy. The Discipline contains virtually no canons for liturgical practice. Despite all the eucharistic reform of the past... continued on page 81

MARK W. WETHINGTON

Although I cling to a gospel of hope, I fear that the signs of our times indicate a greater disconnection than connection in the future of The United Methodist Church. However, I prefer to begin by affirming the triumphs and blessings of our Methodist connection as it has been confirmed through my personal experiences as a pastor. Second, I want to speak to our disconnection; and, third, I want to suggest a means for reforming our connection as a people called Methodists.

In 1985 I traveled behind the Iron Curtain as an ambassador for the North Carolina Annual Conference to visit with Methodist brothers and sisters in Germany and, what was at that time, Czechoslovakia. I entered by rail into southern Czechoslovakia from Vienna, Austria, first being hosted by the Methodist church of Bratislava. About thirty minutes from arriving at the train station, I began to wonder how my hosts... continued on page 84
forty years, most United Methodist churches still do not celebrate the
Lord’s Supper more than once a month in regular public worship and some
of the largest churches not at all.

The United Methodist Church today makes little of ordination. The
*Book of Discipline* allows any pastor under appointment—ordained or not—
to administer the sacraments in his or her charge. The 1996 ministry study
adopted by General Conference removed most of the language that
provided a theological definition and distinction for ordained ministry. All
United Methodists, the *Discipline* now says, are called to servant ministry
and servant leadership. The only practical difference between pastors and
people is that pastors are employed by congregations to provide preaching,
pastoral care, and administration.

Similarly, the denominational unions of the past century have steadily
reduced the role of bishops to being little more than super-pastors. The
term *episcopal* has long since been removed from the denomination’s name.
Virtually all powers that once belonged to bishops—teaching the faith,
setting the agenda for mission, nominating leadership—have been dele­
gated to bodies of laity and clergy. The singular power that bishops retain is
the duty to make and fix pastoral appointments, now carried out in a
consultative process with pastors and laity. Thus, in liturgy, sacrament, ordi­
nation, and episcopacy, The United Methodist Church shows little disposi­
tion for being a church.

By contrast, United Methodism shows lively disposition for being an
evangelical movement. In 1996 the denomination adopted a mission state­
ment that now introduces every major section of the *Discipline*. “The
mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ” (§120). This
slogan, widely shared throughout evangelical Protestantism and the church
growth movement, did not arise particularly from the distinct teachings or
practices of Wesleyanism. Yet it has become the self-definition of the
denomination.

The church does not need a mission statement. The church just is, a gift
of God and a representation and witness of the presence of the triune God
in the world. United Methodism has kept some language with churchly
affinity, such as the grand statement of the baptismal ritual, that “the
Church is of God, and will be preserved to the end of time.” But this ecclesi­
ological gesture is dwarfed by the United Methodist conviction of being a
movement with a mission—and a movement needs a mission statement.

Adoption of the disciple-making slogan introduced a new logic to the denomination's organizational methods—from a structural to a functional approach. The polity for local church and annual conference administration that was shared across the denomination, with a common language of offices and structures and mirrored in local, regional, and general church units, has been deleted from the Discipline. A congregation or conference can organize any way it sees fit in order to fulfill its mission to make disciples. Only the most minimal entities are required—trustees, for example—in great part to meet the standards of civil law. The denomination now speaks consistently of "leadership," with almost no discussion of authority (power legitimated by the faith community), governance, or office.

All these are marks of a movement that throughout its history has resisted institutionalism. The question now is this: what kind of movement will United Methodism become and how will it be organized? Without a standard polity for organizing conference and local church mission, and lacking strong "churchly" bonds such as shared liturgical practice, The United Methodist Church has to find other common ground for its "connections" as a movement.

The denomination's choice to position itself within a larger, late twentieth-century evangelicalism comes with risks. Just as in the days of its birth, the movement is surrounded by other evangelical movements, with various ideas about the meaning and practice of Christian life. Unlike the days of its birth, today's United Methodism does not have an Anglican church to offer it an ecclesiological framework out of which—and sometimes against which—to carry out its mission. "To reform the nation, particularly the Church"—the first phrases of the movement's eighteenth-century "mission statement"—cannot apply when there is no "church." Since The United Methodist Church has exhibited little disposition for defining itself as a church, it is left only with reforming the nation, and with the second half of the original "mission statement"—to spread scriptural holiness—which it has changed to "make disciples." The Discipline even says, "We make disciples" ([122; emphasis mine]) and thus no longer explicitly grounds holiness of life in the holiness and mystery of God. This leaves the movement vulnerable to two kinds of reductionism typical of movements: perpetual activism that turns the gospel into a human project, and an ideological chauvinism that makes the gospel a cartoon of propositional litmus tests.
In this pentecostal moment in United Methodism's history, connectionalism in the institutional sense—that is, expressed through office and ordination, structure and authority, agencies and organizations with continuing programs and budgets—is giving way to connectionalism in a charismatic sense. Conferences and church leaders seek the freedom of the Spirit, to move as the Spirit moves and to follow the Spirit's leading. Spirit and institution have been in tension in the churches throughout Christian history. This is a pentecostal age. In the common parlance of United Methodism, this is an age of Scripture and experience. Reason brings some secondary balance of views. Tradition weighs very lightly. The question for United Methodists is what, if any, of their Wesleyan heritage they will be led to sustain as they generate new directions for their movement.

Thomas Edward Frank is Professor of Church Administration and Congregational Life at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.
might recognize me upon disembarking. In North American style, would someone be holding a placard with my last name on it? Upon arriving and stepping down onto the station platform I began to look around for someone holding “Wethington.” But, instead, there in the short distance was a middle-aged woman holding a poster with the “cross and flame.” In that very moment, two Christians, related through the Wesleyan tradition, “connected” from worlds apart with an embrace of Christ’s peace.

In early 2003, I led a mission team from my local congregation to form a covenant relationship with a congregation of the Iglesia Metodista del Peru. On one evening we shared in worship with the Cuzco Methodists in the highlands of the Andes: Methodists from around the district of Cuzco had been invited to gather. After about an hour of worship, the district superintendent began to introduce the Methodists of his area. One woman, looking haggard from a challenging Andean life, had walked across the mountains for five hours, with a young child strapped to her back, in order to meet and worship with us. We were humbled to realize what this woman had done to be “connected” with Methodists from another land.

Almost six years ago, when I moved to a new pastoral appointment, within a day or so of arriving, a young man, Paul, pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church a few blocks away, dropped by my church office to greet and welcome me to the community. Although our churches were disconnected by a history of racism, this young pastor had come to embrace our spiritual connectedness within a common tradition of Wesleyan spirituality.

This “connection” among people called Methodist has been one of the greatest blessings of ministry. As the Book of Discipline articulates, we are connected by “sharing a common tradition of faith.” Our connection is a “vital web of interactive relationships” ( ¶130).

And, yet, painful has been the witness of our dis-connection! As I talked with the district superintendent of the Cuzco district, I became acutely aware of his daily sacrifice and the material poverty of his people. To visit the churches of his district he makes the circuit on donkey-back. At the same time, I was aware of a district superintendent back home who did his circuit riding in an automotive animal called a Jaguar! How “connected” we are, and yet how “dis-connected”! Indeed, money is one the most horrific signs of our dis-connection as a church!
In considering whether there is a future in our connection as United Methodists, it will be necessary that we as a church address more seriously the nature of our dis-connection. Through the grace of conversation, within a framework of mutual accountability, there is the urgent need for our collective conscience to be more awakened to the things that dis-connect us, to be willing to confess them, and to resolve to reform them.

While many of us would embrace our denominational advertising theme of “open hearts, open minds, and open doors” as admirable, it is theologically thin and tends to water down our distinctiveness as a Methodist people. The “pluralism” that was heralded in a 1990s edition of our Discipline has continued to pull our church into “Sheilaism,” a phrase coined by Robert Bellah in Habits of the Heart to capture the privatization of religion in American society, based on the authority of the autonomous individual. In many ways, United Methodists have endorsed this trend, which contributes to our dis-connection from one another and from our distinctiveness as a Methodist people. Unfortunately, in many places in the church, we regard “respect” for the privacy of religion as more important than the challenging work of being connected through the blessed grace of conversation within the framework of mutual accountability. I suggest that the grace of conversation within the context of accountability is the key to reforming our connection.

In a denomination that has witnessed a large decline in membership, we are content to accept generic Christian affirmations as sufficient for church membership. In addition, many pastors are timid to stand firm on the church’s positions regarding important issues of our times, such as capital punishment and the sin of militarism, because we fear driving members or prospective members—and their money—away. To be a truly “open” church, we must create circles of accountability within which the grace of conversation can honestly take place, always within the strong bounds of our doctrine.

What do I mean by “creating circles of accountability within the grace of conversation”? In the past twenty years or so we have seen some revival of a way of accountability within our church, both within local congregations and within global church relationships. While this has been taking place largely low key, it is well past time for this movement to catch the imagination of the whole connection.

This “way” is the “method” that was at the core of the Wesleyan revival.
In recent years, it has been reawakened through the work of David Lowes Watson. The work that he began some years ago in reviving John Wesley's original method is being continued and magnified through the Office of Accountable Discipleship of the General Board of Discipleship in Nashville, along with a relatively unknown affiliate organization, called the Council for Accountable Discipleship.

Gradually but surely this work is penetrating local congregations across United Methodism, while also having a global impact. Herein lies the hope for forming a true connection among clergy and laity, across racial and cultural divides between the worst of our differences and even the hope, I believe, for an honest and truly connected Order among our elders and deacons. Unlike the many programes being marketed to the church, this work represents our "method" for being a Methodist people—a means of forming genuine and faithful discipleship. It is my hope that through the continuing work of the Holy Spirit this way will flow into the bloodstream of our entire connection, spreading the grace of accountability everywhere throughout the church, across all that both divides and unites us as a people called Methodists.

Could something as simple as the model of mutual accountability of the early class meeting be the key to reforming our connection as a people called Methodists? Indeed, I believe that it is the key, if we will genuinely devote ourselves to it.

Mark W. Weilbington is Pastor at Southern Pines United Methodist Church in Southern Pines, North Carolina.
Human Beings and Change

I am in a time of many changes in my life. I am helping my mother move from her rural home of the past thirty years back into the city and an assisted-living facility. It is a move that she and our family are looking forward to, even as she and I go through her belongings to decide what to bring, what to leave behind, and what to give to others. My daughter has just graduated from seminary and has taken her first full-time clergy appointment. I am helping her make that transition in living accommodations and in the job responsibilities she now has. My colleague at work has died after two years of fighting valiantly against cancer. At the time of her death I was rejoicing that two associates had been hired and were arriving to help me with the workload I have shouldered in these two years as a result of my cherished colleague’s illness. Change is the essence of living. If you are not changing and growing, then you are dead or dying.

“We have never done things this way before.” These are familiar words that every church leader has heard or even said when confronting some proposed changed or some hierarchical directive that demands that we alter some “tried and true” program or procedure. Human beings have difficulty dealing with change. Our tendency is to maintain the status quo. Entering a changed or changing situation disturbs our comfort zone and requires us to think about things in ways that may call into question our understanding of what is true, what we believe, and what our relationship is to God and to God’s created world. Change breaks our routines, disturbs our system of habitual responses, and questions what we really value and believe. Except when we are the catalysts and advocates for that change, we don’t like it. Even then we may have some measure of ambivalence about the change.

So problematic is change for us that we respond with grief to what we
perceive and extol as positive change. Joy and sadness are often companions. We experience relief at the death of a loved one who has been released from awful suffering or from a long period in which there was no quality of life. Weddings frequently bring both laughter and tears, as we welcome a new member of the family while realizing that our relationships and interactions with our family member will change. We are happy about the promotion or better job opportunity. Our creative juices may be flowing as we contemplate the new challenges and opportunities; at the same time, we may grieve the loss of valued coworkers, our old office space, and the comfort of knowing our job and doing it well. Even when we move to our dream house, there is an element of sadness as we leave our old home and the familiar, lived-in places that hold memories and pieces of ourselves and those we love. We are thankful that the surgeons cut off the gangrene, but we grieve the loss of the leg; and we may experience afterwards its perceived presence and long for its return. We want things to be the way they were even when we know we must move on.

Even a casual student of church history knows that things are always changing. But it is easier to look back and see from where we have come and why than to deal with the current forces of change we experience. It is easier to assess the choices our religious traditions and institutions have taken previously. It is much harder to be in the midst of that change, to be a person who is a catalyst for change or who participates in the decision-making or who is immediately affected by significant change.

Seen from a distance change is much easier to deal with than when we experience it up close. Almost two decades ago, I served on a commission whose purpose was to help congregations become involved in ministry with the persons who were coming into their transitioning communities. An Anglo congregation had claimed it wanted to grow and reach people in what was becoming a Hispanic community. But this congregation repeatedly made decisions that showed that it was not ready to change in ways that would make the Hispanics feel welcome. In reality, what they wanted was for the Hispanic people to change and be more like the Anglo persons who were already in the congregation. They were not ready for change.

The Godhead and Change
We like to say that God is changeless, but what do we mean by that? Certainly God's attributes are changeless: God is love; God is just; God is
merciful; God is impartial. However, the record of the Scriptures and our experience of God indicate that change is a principle very much in harmony with God's will and purpose. Change occurs in our relationship to and in our journey with God. Religious leaders, locales for worship and ministry, programs and mission projects—all change; and time and circumstances evolve and shift. Attitudes about certain practices change. For example, Jewish worshipers originally were required to offer animal and harvest sacrifices to God. Later, God made clear to the Chosen People God's challenge for them to sacrifice themselves as stewards of the resources with which they were gifted—both material goods and time and talents. Currently we esteem the nuclear family as the ideal, but first there was polygamy, in the form of both concubines and multiple wives. The demand for monogamy in marital relationships came much later in the journey with God.

We Christians are conservators, holding on to the status quo and justifying that hold on the basis of tradition and Scripture. But we must not forget that we are conservators who are followers of One who was radical. Jesus was a change agent. He effected change to bring attitudes and actions into harmony with the will and character of God. On many occasions, what Jesus taught was counter to the culture and to the religious understanding of his day. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. The one who would be leader must be servant to all. Bleeding women were not taboo. Children were to be included and recognized; in fact, only those who became as children could enter the Kingdom of Heaven. God did not necessarily favor traditional leaders; the poor, rejected, and uneducated could be the instruments that God chose to use. People were not made for the Law; the Law was for the benefit of the people. Love your enemy and pray for those who abuse you. In Matt. 15:6, Jesus makes the accusation, "So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God." It is not what goes into a person's mouth that defiles, he says, but what comes out of it that makes the person unclean (Matt. 15:17-20). We follow One who modeled change in people related to God and God's creation.

Moving through Change

Luke directed this writing to Theophilus, someone with a Greek name and probably a person of means and station. The "acts of the apostles" were their responses to the outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit; therefore, their acts were the acts of the Holy Spirit. These acts resulted in the dispersion of the gospel among both Jews (ch. 2) and Gentiles (ch. 10).

The author asserts that he writes so that Theophilus and others may know the truth (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1, 2). Could this be because something had happened to make the believers uncertain and confused? Was the inclusion of Gentiles into the community a source of concern? Had they begun to doubt all that had happened as manifestations of God's will and way? The author writes as a believer to others who are believers, making theological sense of changes, developments, and the unfolding of the church.

In Acts, Luke records the progress of salvation, from its origins in the Jewish community into the Gentile world. This is a "highly evocative story of the church's beginnings that traces its dramatic growth from sacred Jerusalem to imperial Rome." Covering a period of about three decades, Acts tells a historical, but selective, story of this unfolding. During that time, "The Way," previously embraced by persons who understood themselves to be ethnically and religiously Jews, became distinct from Judaism. In Antioch, adherents to The Way—those who followed Jesus and those who came to believe in him—began to be called "Christians" rather than "Jews." This change presented those who experienced the way of Jesus with great theological problems. The Jews' rejection of the gospel and the growing and gradual alienation between predominantly Gentile Christendom and the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had first received God's promise, created a tension. This tension was especially strong between the Jews and Jewish Christians. Acts was probably written during a time when it was theologically and politically expedient for the Jewish roots of Christianity to be clear. Thus, Christianity could enjoy the religious freedom accorded Jews; and Gentile Christians would embrace the Jewish Scriptures and practices in order to be "fully Christian."

Christianity is rooted in Judaism; yet the Jews rejected it, and the Gentiles who had no roots in Judaism embraced it. How could this be? God's promise had been given to the Jews, not to the Gentiles. Luke understood the Jews' rejection and the Gentiles' embracing of the gospel as part of God's plan of salvation. Acts asserts the theological understanding that God still has God's chosen people—the church. As this new understanding
dawns, the Holy Spirit prods, directs, and drives the church. How the change in self-understanding unfolded becomes clear over the course of the fourth through seventh Sundays of Easter. Together, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of the Acts express the continuity of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the Jewish context with the birth of the church among the Gentiles. The four weeks follow the movement of the gospel on its outward path from Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, through Asia Minor toward Rome. Salvation history was then, and continues to be marked today, by significant points of change. It is an unfolding that was undergirded by a set of core convictions and practices that marked out the Christian community and its members. While the practices within the community took shape and became defined and refined, these beliefs, including the beliefs of Judaism, were the molding influence. For Luke, the loss of connection with the core beliefs and practices of Judaism presented a threat far greater than paganism. The conflict between synagogue and church became more pronounced later in the life of the church; this is problematic, because the two religious expressions have a common history and theology. Acts provides a record of how that emerging problem impacted the mission of the church and was dealt with by early believers. The Book of Acts is not history in the modern sense. Luke, whoever he may have been, undertook the task of interpreting and granting theological significance to past events, rather than describing them objectively or with factual precision, as modern readers might expect.

As we examine the four passages from Luke’s narrative, we will focus on theological understandings within them that supported the changes that occurred in the Christian community’s self-understanding and their understanding of God’s intentions. In general, each passage affirms the basic theological understanding that all who believe in Jesus and earnestly repent would be saved—Jews first and then Gentiles. Of ultimate consequence was repentance, or lack thereof; it was the only distinction between persons that mattered.

What do these texts have to say to us as we struggle with modern-day questions of who is included in the Christian community? How should the church relate to its homosexual members? What is the place of women in leadership of our communities of faith? How do we reconcile Christian practices with various cultural practices as the gospel continues to make its way into the hearts of persons from various cultures around the world?
What is the value of these four pericopes for our formation as Christians, both within our Christian communities and in the social contexts in which we live in the twenty-first century? Does it matter if we read these passages as records of the acts of the apostles or as the acts of the Holy Spirit? How can Acts help us as we encounter and work through change?

May 2, 2004—Fourth Sunday of Easter
Acts 9:36-43; Ps. 23; Rev. 7:9-17; John 10:22-30

This pericope comes in the midst of the record of Peter's ministry outside of Jerusalem. It occurs between the story of Peter's curing a paralytic at Lydda and his visit to the Roman centurion, Cornelius, following Peter's kill-and-eat vision. The miracles Peter performed in Lydda, coupled with the miracle at Jaffa (the same city from which Jonah was sent to Nineveh), affirmed Peter's status as leading apostle. It was this status that enabled him to take the bold step of opening the way for Gentiles to receive salvation. The miracles that Peter performs evoke memory of Jesus' own miraculous deeds and connect Peter's to Jesus' work on earth. This link bestows on Peter an authority that supports his subsequent actions among the Gentiles. The one who heals is the Christ, working in and through Peter. Peter is the agent of the Holy Spirit, the conduit for God's will to be known and done among the people.

There are precedents in the Old Testament for resurrection of the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:32-37); thus, Peter's miracle at Jaffa suggests a continuity that extends backward from Peter through Jesus to Elijah. Peter took on the prophetic role and authority to declare the truth that God's healing power is available to all who believe. This simple act of claiming God's power, which resulted in Tabitha's resuscitation, is important also because it disclosed the gospel's invitation to widows, who were marginalized in the community. They too were invited to believe. They had witnessed Tabitha's death, preparations for her burial, and her coming back to life. Many of them, as well as others, responded to this invitation and turned to the Lord.

If the conversion of Cornelius and his Gentile household were to be accepted, then it was important to back it up with credentials of authenticity and authority. In the Old Testament, visions are means of revealing and testifying to God's will (Exod. 3:1-12; Isa. 6; Jer. 1). Cornelius's and Peter's visions help to validate the "new thing" that is taking place as God's will, namely, that God is accepting Gentiles and the marginalized into the orbit of salvation.
May 9, 2004—Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 11:1-18; Ps. 148; Rev. 21:1-6; John 13:31-35

Properly to understand Acts 11:1-18 one must interpret it against the backdrop of the events taking place in Acts 10. Peter’s visions and visit to Cornelius’s house and the conversion of the latter’s household provide the reasons for the events in ch. 11. Peter had become a missionary to the Gentiles; he had been their household guest and eaten with them. This was a major affront—an abomination—to Jewish sensibilities. Circumcision, kosher eating, and ritual purity are central to the integrity of Jewishness and faithfulness to God. Compare, for example, Leviticus 11 with the contents of the sheet in Peter’s vision (Acts 10:12). For other Jews to accept what Peter had done was a major hurdle. Indeed, it had been a major hurdle for Peter too. But this acceptance was essential to ensure unity and solidarity in a Christian community that was becoming very diverse. The desire for “purity” among the Jews had to do with ensuring their community’s unity and the clear delineation between them and their pagan context. Thus, Jewish Christians found it inconceivable that the Christian community would not be sought through the same posture.

In justifying the incorporation of the Gentiles, Peter appealed to the experience of Pentecost: Pentecost was repeated in Cornelius’s household. Peter asserted that he was obeying God and that that experience was the sign that God intended repentance for Gentiles, as well as for Jews. Sharing of the Pentecost experience, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, became the new means of identifying those who belong to the community. This represents a major turn of events. It opened the way for Paul to continue the missionary work among Gentiles. The fact that the Jerusalem church accepted Peter’s reasoning kept the church from splintering into Jewish and Gentile factions. The Jerusalem church did not take the initiative in advancing the gospel beyond its borders. Yet, when new practices or directions did emerge, the Jerusalem leaders’ stamp of approval was important. The Apostles were unsuccessful in converting the “unbelieving” nation of Israel. Now, the mission turned to Gentile nations, giving them the opportunity to accept conversion. The Jerusalem church did not reject this new venture; they praised God (v. 18) for the new believers. They did not accuse Peter of baptizing the uncircumcised. Their objections centered on purity issues—on the fact that Peter entered a Gentile home and ate there. These were the
same reservations that Peter had experienced; and he needed a vision from God to change his mind. So, in countering objections from the Jerusalem leadership, Peter related his vision. His vision was regarded as a sign of God's acceptance and required the acquiescence of Peter's inquisitors, who conceded that repentance results in the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, whether one was Jew or Gentile.

The underlying demand for circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses as prerequisites for inclusion in the Christian community were left unaddressed. This demand was on the agenda of a second Jerusalem assembly, when Paul's work among the Gentiles was called into question (Acts 14:27-15:29).

**May 16, 2004—Sixth Sunday of Easter**

Acts 16:9-15; Ps. 67; Rev. 21:10, 22-22:5; John 14:23-29

This pericope changes our focus from Peter to Paul as the catalyst for ministry to the Gentiles. In it, Paul, led by the Holy Spirit through the blocking of opportunities in Asia, moved the mission into Europe. Now it was Paul who had a vision, a call to go into Europe, to Macedonia. This was the first of five visions Paul was to experience (Acts 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 27:21-26). Like others, in his visions Paul received instruction and encouragement from God for the work he was to do. His visions usually preceded momentous events in his mission. This one portended the geographic shift for Paul's evangelistic endeavors, where Paul and Silas are imprisoned because of their preaching.

When Paul and Silas crossed the border into Macedonia, the gospel came one step closer in its continued outward journey toward Rome. The conversion of Lydia in Philippi validated this change in venue into new Gentile territory. (Note that the place of Sabbath prayer is not the synagogue, as would be expected, but the riverside.) Judaism had been successful in attracting a number of Gentile women of means (Acts 13:50). Lydia, the "God-fearer," is numbered among them. She is a woman of wealth and status, probably Greek rather than Roman, who is also a Gentile patron of Jewish worship. Her story indicates the success of these missions to households and the rising status of Christianity.

**May 23, 2004—Seventh Sunday of Easter**

Acts 16:16-34; Ps 97; Rev. 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21; John 17:20-26

This pericope is followed by the story of the difficulty Paul and Silas had with the Jews in Thessalonica. But first Luke recorded a success story and a
validation of this venture by a miraculous occurrence. Like the apostles (Acts 5:19-20) and Peter (Acts 12:6-11), Paul and Silas experience a miracle of release. It begins with the recognition by an unholy spirit that these men and their message are of God. Though the female seer spoke the truth, Paul's exorcism witnessed to the God of Israel's supreme authority and distanced the Christian mission from those for whom prophecy was a means of economic gain.

The seer's owners, who call themselves Romans, identify Paul and Silas as Jews, whose beliefs Romans held in contempt. These identifications make clear that the dispute is not between Christians and Jews but between Christians and Romans. Here again we note Luke's desire to affirm the connection between Christianity and Judaism. Paul's actions in Philippi clearly attest to his identification with his Jewish heritage. The crowd's joining in with their condemnation highlights the hostile climate. Paul and Silas suffer (as did Jesus) when they are flogged severely as punishment. This hostility stands in contrast with what Paul and Silas experienced in jail and with the deliverance of the jailer through his conversion.

The real release story is the freeing of the jailer through the agency of those who had been imprisoned. The release of Paul and Silas is a prelude to it. Note three unexpected events. First, Paul and Silas respond to their circumstances with prayer and with singing God's praises. Second, the other prisoners listen attentively to their testimony of faith. Third, Paul and Silas do not take the escape made possible by the earthquake. It is as if Luke intends for these events to provide the context for the jailer's unexpected conversion. The jailer asks a key question: In what ways does one have to act to change one's future and be saved? The conversion of the jailer's and of Lydia's households—radically different situations—both witness to the universal availability of God's saving intention, which crosses all social differences and barriers. Luke sees no distinction between being saved from physical danger and being saved from spiritual danger. Is the message in the return to their previous work at Lydia's house that the world—Jewish and Roman—could not prevail against the gospel and its continued spread?

Conclusion

How far Christianity had come! Once a minority group within Judaism, now it was a religious power accepted as like and yet unlike Judaism. Its membership had expanded to include Gentiles and it had spread across
most of the known world. And it was heading to the center of the world at the time—Rome. What changes would the church face in that context?

Acts presents the Holy Spirit as both the inspiration and the power for change. It challenges its believing readers to remember that the church's apostolic founders modeled for us a calling, character, message, and faith that all Christians are summoned to follow in their obedience to God's will. The evolving of the church was a challenging process. It remains so today. The early church was able to adapt to change and to tolerate diversity with the attendant confusion and controversy. Luke suggests in Acts that such pluralism might be necessary to the God who calls any who would believe to receive the gift of salvation. This is significant to our theological understanding and our religious practice. These early church leaders were able to examine their traditions, rules, beliefs, and understandings and make changes, remove obstacles, and expand the boundaries of inclusion to reflect what they believed to be a more faithful response to God's gift of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. They were flexible. They took seriously their religious traditions and sacred texts; but, according to Acts, they also saw God's revelation in the surprising events and circumstances that God's people experienced. They had experienced Jesus as a model of one who understands God's will and way in ways that were in conflict with accepted religious traditions, practices, and views. They chose to follow Jesus' model. They accepted change, trusting the Holy Spirit's activity among them. Are we willing in our discipleship to struggle together to discern where the Holy Spirit is guiding us and to accept the change that makes us more faithful in our discipleship?

Youtha Hardman-Cromwell is Director of the Office of Practice in Ministry and Mission at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

Endnotes

Years ago I was taught a lesson by my five-year-old son, Dave, now a young adult. He asked me about something; and being a young and earnest parent, I immediately launched into a very long, and I thought informative, explanation to answer his question. After listening to me for a few moments, David interrupted me and said, "Daddy, you talk like Owl." The "owl" he was referring to was the exceedingly verbose and sometimes pompous character in the Winnie the Pooh stories. The moral of the story? Audiences of all ages appreciate simple and direct answers. So in answer to the question about the nature, theories, and latest trends in congregational studies, one direct answer is that congregational studies is an intentional, systematized focus on the life and ministries of congregations in their particular contexts. Another way to understand congregational studies is that it analyzes faith communities that exist as "spaces of sociability, laboratories for civic participation, places of moral guidance and nurture, and points of contact with transcendent power that can work transformative miracles small and large." Of course, much more can be said about congregational studies in that the core of congregational studies is both simple and complex. At the risk of talking "like Owl," I suggest that the core nature of congregational studies can be said to be a type of kerygma.

Within biblical and theological studies the term kerygma, with the basic meaning of "preaching" or "proclamation," is used to refer to the essential content of the message of early Christianity. In New Testament studies the word was adopted to refer to the core apostolic proclamation, the essential preaching content of the Good News, or even the preaching act itself. To speak of the core kerygma of the early church is a consolidated way to speak of the key aspects of the Christian message—those elements that are perceived to be fundamental and from which other teachings and practices emanate.

Leaving for now questions of origin, exact content, formation, and
transmission of the biblical kerygma to New Testament scholars, the concept of kerygma can be used as a way to better understand the essential nature of congregational studies (without any claim to apostolic authority). That is to say, in referring to the kerygma of congregational studies it is claimed that there is indeed a primary teaching; a basic proclamation, and a minimal body of knowledge that characterizes the discipline.

Basic to understanding the kerygma of congregational studies is being clear on what exactly is meant by the term congregational studies. Many groups and individuals use the designation. While it is possible to study congregations in a way that has very little to do with congregations, congregational studies is not simply a set of analytical tools that people looking for a quick-fix answer to a particular problem of congregational life can use to determine what a congregation is doing "right" or "wrong." Congregational studies is more than a tool for concerns and agendas outside of the congregation. Congregational studies is one way to do localized research of and for particular faith communities. It is not learning simply about a congregation; rather, it involves learning together with the congregation, both persons inside and outside the congregation. Hence, the parties involved are co-learners.

Congregational studies by that designation has a relatively short history, but it is rooted in earlier efforts to understand congregations in something other than utilitarian ways. While congregational studies connects with many academic disciplines, it has two core aspects: its love for congregations and its uppermost desire to listen to, learn from, challenge, and energize congregations. A foundational theorist and practitioner in congregational studies, the late James F. Hopewell, observed, "Their congenial struggle to ground a love of the local church in disciplined study continually refreshed me." It may seem obvious, but it is still important to state that this understanding of congregational studies has congregations as its primary concern—not as sources of data or of statistical reports or objects of remote study but as living communities. Although one may study congregations in a disciplined way, it does make a profound difference to be reminded always that one is studying faith communities, congregations of people who come together sharing in some sense an understanding of God and of God's presence in their lives and in the world. Congregational studies cherishes congregations while attempting not to romanticize them or prohibit their focused examination.
Congregational studies recognizes the existence of home-grown, lived religion and local theologies present in congregations and exemplified by many local traditions and practices. To get a sense of this local religion, it is essential to discover congregations through firsthand encounter. Therefore, another aspect of the kerygma of congregational studies is that it is experiential. By its nature congregational studies cannot be armchair learning; rather, it engages local traditions and practices.

Building upon this affirmation of a love for congregations are additional characteristics that are part of the core kerygma of congregational studies. Part of the reason for the high value placed on congregations is a result of what they are and what they do. In another helpful resource, Congregations in Transition, Carl Dudley and Nancy Ammerman state:

> Congregations have never been more important. In a mobile and fragmented world they are a spiritual home, a gathering place where caring, trusting relationships are built and nurtured. In a world where outsiders' voices are often kept silent, congregations invite those voices to speak. In a world of great need, congregations provide support and comfort, food and shelter, training and advocacy. In a world that seeks moral and spiritual guidance but has no clear tradition to guide it, congregations preserve and renew traditions, calling their members and communities to accountability and vision.

These qualities of congregations at their best are what elicit the desire to listen to, learn from, as well as to challenge and energize them. Congregations at their best also contribute to the affection for them that is generated.

Emerging out of its love for congregations and respect for their communal life is a fundamental commitment to context. This translates into an understanding that the best way to study congregations is "up close." In their own settings. Congregational studies combines theory and practice in its fundamental commitment to field experience. In the field, practice, theory, theology, observation, and analysis are constantly in conversation.

In addition to Hopewell’s book, another seminal work in congregational studies is the Handbook for Congregational Studies, produced by a team of pioneers in the field. It evolved out of the team’s efforts to place the congregation itself rather than individual scholarly disciplines at the center... Here the focus is on the congregation in
its complexity and only secondarily on how particular approaches to congregational study can be used in its life.

The *Handbook* was used by many and proved to be helpful in better understanding congregations and their communities. With additional work done in the study of congregations, the *Handbook* was followed up in 1998 with *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook.* As a complete revision and update of the *Handbook,* *Studying Congregations* is comprehensive and can be used in both classroom and congregation and with laypersons or clergy. Reading *Studying Congregations* and the stream of congregational studies it represents with profit requires that one recognizes the hermeneutical "lenses"—the way of focusing on specific topical areas for observing different aspects of congregational life and ministry—that these resources employ. For its part, *Studying Congregations* uses the lenses of ecology, culture, process, resources, and theology for understanding the character and practices of congregations. This "lens" approach is one of the basic methodologies for this type of congregational study, in which congregational history and stories, ministries, and processes are examined. Without a doubt, *Studying Congregations* is a basic text for those new to the discipline.

Another helpful work is Nancy Ammerman’s widely acclaimed *Congregation and Community.* In this volume, for which Ammerman is the principal interpreter and writer, a team of researchers studied over twenty congregations across the United States, examining how congregations react to significant changes in their communities. Ammerman uses the interpretive threefold rubric of resources, culture, and structures of authority to analyze congregations that seem to cluster around certain types in accordance to their response to change and the different ways churches adjust their practices and identities.

An additional tool for anyone interested both in the study of congregations and the makeover of the religious landscape in the United States is Donald E. Miller’s *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium.* Over a period of five years, Miller studied what he terms “new paradigm churches,” also known as “mega-churches” or “postdenominational congregations.” In particular, he researched three churches that began in southern California and have experienced phenomenal growth: Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Calvary Chapel, and Hope Chapel. All three are examples of congregations that blend contemporary, nontraditional
church culture and spirituality. These congregations, and others like them, offered an appealing alternative to many expressions of historic Protestant mainline churches. This book not only provides another angle on congregational studies but also profiles significant transformations in religion in the United States during the last part of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first century. One of the benefits of this book is the insight it provides into popular alternatives in Christian worship, congregational organization, and pastoral leadership.

A further important work in the study of congregations is Penny Edgell Becker’s *Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life*. A sociologist of religion, Becker bases her analysis on the study of twenty-three suburban Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faith communities in Chicago. She focuses her study on congregations as institutions and on “individual-expressive” religious choices that link individuals to faith communities. In particular, Becker concentrates on how individuals and congregations handle conflict and the different congregational models she observed based on their understanding and response to conflict.

In *A Particular Place: Urban Restructuring and Religious Ecology in a Southern Exurb*, Nancy Eiesland studies congregations in response to demographic changes in context. She observes that, as congregations continue to fulfill their callings and missions in their own contexts, those who study congregations “must turn [their] attention to these particular places in order to account for religious restructuring in the United States. Religious life in all its local detail reveals the shape of things to come.”

One of the benefits in taking up congregational studies is the possibility of congregational and personal transformation and change with ecclesiological and theological implications. When done well in a disciplined, nonmanipulative way, the process of congregational studies can galvanize a congregation and its pastor(s) in their relationships with each other and with their communities. Through the disciplined, reflective process of congregational studies, a church can come to appreciate its shared mission in new ways. Fresh appreciation and new understanding may also lead to reenergized commitments to mission and ministry. Congregational studies can be a process in which a congregation can enter into conversation with itself, the communities with which it relates, as well as those to whom it does not relate at the time. Therefore, another characteristic of the kerygma of congregational studies is its ability to produce...
new insight into the dimensions of congregational life and activity. Each congregation is a multilayered universe, with explicit and implicit connections to other complex entities.

An additional mark of the kerygma of congregational studies is that the very process of doing congregational studies is organic rather than organizational; congregational studies comprises both process and content. Indeed, it is through the process that much of the particulars of content are discovered. There is a certain fluidity to the process that some persons may find unnerving, but there is strength in this organic process. Sometimes the process gives a congregation not only new understanding of self and community but also the ability and the power to make changes. Congregational studies calls for theological attention to the fine line between the indicative (the current situation) and the subjunctive (what could be). Ultimately, congregational studies can help those who are willing to understand congregations better and risk living on this liminal edge of engaged contextual ministry.

Even this brief survey of the perspective of congregational studies and a few approaches that can be used in the study of congregations shows a final mark of the kerygma of congregational studies: there are many ways to conduct a focused and disciplined study of a congregation and the specifics of its life and ministry. At the same time, the use of multiple lenses affirms that there are limits to tools of perception and that there is no one, universal lens or ultimate way for understanding all congregations at all times and in all places. All the approaches can contribute to a better understanding of congregations and their contexts. With a basic appreciation for congregations and an eclectic methodology that combines the insights and work of theology and social theory, congregational studies encourages a broad approach to understanding congregations.

Edwin David Aponte is Assistant Professor of Christianity and Culture at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, in Dallas, Texas.

Endnotes
2. See, for example, H. Paul Douglas, The Church in the Changing City (New York: Doran, 1927).
6. Ibid., 3.
With God in the Crucible: Preaching Costly Discipleship. by Peter Storey (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002)

"Stop the bleeding!" rather than "Analyze the cause!" is a fair description of the impassioned plea embedded in these pages of a prophetic minister of the gospel during a time of severe testing for prophets in South Africa, 1976–1994.

This book draws upon a collection of sermons and addresses given by Peter Storey in a variety of contexts to illustrate the role of leadership and preaching of costly discipleship in apartheid South Africa in the years 1966–1992. Bookended by a Foreword by Desmond Tutu and an Epilogue by William H. Willimon, these "extraordinary sermons" reveal "the insight of a prophet and the care of a pastor." They compellingly exemplify how preaching may occur, the open Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other, without compromising the gospel or blunting the sharp edges of harsh reality. One cannot escape the located-ness and life-relatedness of the preacher in these sermons.

Courage and eloquence are fused together in the crucible of experience and become the throbbing center of Peter Storey's witness in these pages. His prophetic ministry is rendered as a pastor, as a denominational and ecumenical leader, and as a sharp thorn in the ruling regime's side. The skill of consummate craftsmanship in words coupled with the unerring aim of astute political analysis are reflected in the choice of subject—remarkably apt for each setting—and the substance and logical simplicity of each contribution. Each forms a cameo, or mosaic, rendered crystal clear by its exposure to and endurance in the fire of faith under test. Most of the sermons in this collection were preached in the Central Methodist Mission, the large downtown church in the heart of Johannesburg, where Storey served as senior pastor from 1976 to 1989.

The reader cannot escape either an encounter with the gospel of Christ as embodied in the Wesleyan tradition or a personal introduction to the "loved pastor and preacher of depth and sensibility," whose sermons "glowed with the beauty and nobility of Christ"—that is, Peter's father.
Clifford K. Storey. The voices and influence of other prophets contemporary with the writer echo in his writings: Martin Niemoller, Donald Soper, Clarence Jordan, Beyers Naude, Alan Walker, Desmond Tutu, to name a few.

This volume should be required reading for all young aspirants to the pastoral ministry who are tempted to split the gospel into two: a spiritual one dealing with personal salvation and a social one dealing with issues of public justice and peace. In the words of another great Methodist, E. Stanley Jones, to do so is to create a corpse without a soul and a spirit without a body. This book should infuse hope into those who live in societies where forces like those that almost destroyed South Africa are dangerously alive. The book should be read by those in places where the church has become so embedded in the culture that effective prophecy within that context has become impossible.

The force and substance of this volume should not be underestimated. Others may write at greater length and employ greater theological heavy-weight timber in construction. None can surpass the simplicity, clarity, urgency, and uncompromising intensity of these prophetic utterances, rendered in “living color, and with high fidelity sound.” They ring true. They stand the test of pressure and fire. I was privileged to have heard Peter Storey preach during the week that “Here We Stand” was presented as part of his Introduction to testimony before the Commission of Inquiry into the South African Council of Churches in Pretoria on March 9, 1983. The seamless robe of his witness before the hostile Judge Eloff and the Eloff Commission and that of his gospel sermon during that Easter preparation season was striking and authentic. To read this volume is to experience this. It is also to relive—secondhand—the result of the attempted humiliation of Storey by Prime Minister John Vorster that led to the Methodist Covenant of Obedience, a journey under the Cross in the 1980s that helped to pave the way to 1994 and the first fully democratic elections for all South Africans.

David Peter Whitelaw is Emeritus Professor at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, California.

Rosetta E. Ross, chair of the Department of Religion at Spelman College, examines the witnessing and testifying of seven African American women—Ella Baker, Septima Poinsette Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Way DeLee, Clara Muhammad, Diane Nash, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson—who played important roles in the Civil Rights Movement, but whose work has gone unrecognized and was overshadowed by male Civil Rights leaders. In the words of Septima Poinsette Clark,

In stories about the Civil Rights movement you hear mostly about the black ministers. But if you talk to the women who were there, you'll hear another story. I think the Civil Rights Movement would never have taken off if some women hadn't started to speak up. A lot more are just getting to the place now where they can speak.

Witnessing and Testifying is organized into six chapters, each focusing on the motivation and contributions of Black women to civil rights: "Religion and Public Life"; "Continuing Traditions"; "Giving the Movement Life"; "Clara Muhammad"; "Fire Shut in My Bones"; and "Testimony, Witnessing and Civil Rights Participation." Ross uses the first generation of Womanist scholars—Kate Geneva Cannon, Delores S. Williams, Jacquelyn Grant, and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes—to provide the theological and ethical context for interpreting the activities of these women.

The author focuses on the testifying and witnessing of six Christian women and one Muslim woman. Although differing in ages, education level, economic situation, locale, and primary vocation, these women shared some things in common. They were all deeply influenced by an elder or elders and by traditions of faith in their communities through community work motivated by religious traditions. Each woman sought to make society better for all people. These women responded to God in ordinary activity by attending to and caring for the physical and emotional needs of the people in their communities. In contrast to some of the male Civil Rights leaders, these women focused on empowering the local people to take charge of the issues facing the community instead of looking for a deliverer from the outside.
These women not only were major contributors to the Civil Rights Movement but also shared in the founding and formation of Civil Rights groups. For example, Ella Baker was chosen to get the Southern Christian Leadership Conference up and running when it was formed in 1957. She was also influential in organizing the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in 1960. Baker persuaded the students to form a separate organization and not to become an auxiliary of the established Civil Rights organizations. She consistently opposed the elitism of the NAACP that failed to attend to the masses, and was "overly concerned with recognition from whites." (44) She was just as critical of the clergy-led Southern Christian Leadership Conference for being too heavily dependent on mass meetings and eloquent exhortations rather than following through on programs, training, organizing, and building alliances.

Ministers and laypersons will find the main title of the book, Witnessing and Testifying, engaging and timely. Ross holds that testifying and witnessing presuppose an encounter with God. She defines testifying as speaking about one's personal encounter with God and witnessing as reflecting one's behavioral response to God's activity and presence. Testifying is a prerequisite to witnessing. All of these tenacious women had experienced an encounter with God so powerful that it made it impossible to keep the experience to herself. They lived out their faith by validating their conversion with words and deeds. In short, testifying is "talking the talk," but witnessing is "walking the walk."

Ross makes a compelling case for these illustrious Black women Civil Rights leaders who were unafraid to put their lives on the line in the struggle for freedom and justice for all Americans. She cogently argues that Black women viewed their involvement in Civil Rights as an extension of their call to discipleship. They never even considered the question about the appropriate relations of religion and politics, which frequently encumbers religious people considering engagement in public life. These women had a "charge to keep and a God to glorify." Their conversion had called them to witness and they were not free to hold their peace.

Witnessing is rooted deeply in deciphering truth and justice in the courtroom. The call to testifying and witnessing denotes giving evidence of an event and making that evidence known. These exemplary Black women courageously stepped outside the comfort zone of personal piety to bring the meaning of the profession of their faith into the systems, institutions, and conventions of social life.
This work challenges the preachers in the pulpit and the people in the pews to break the huddle and go where the fight is going on—in the marketplace and the public square. This book is a compelling source for the church to become the Word in action.

Love Henry Whelchel, Jr. is Professor and Chair of Religion and Philosophy at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia.
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